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tested p54

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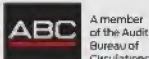
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Krell's
multichannel
marvels
tested, p48



WELCOME

We're off on a magical visit to AV land this month,
with our *Alice in Wonderland* cover introducing a
fabulous TV from Sony – the Monolith.



Combining hi-tech features with a classic design
which wouldn't look out of place in a Queen's palace, it's a
stunner from any angle, and you can read about it on page 44.

Elsewhere, Krell's mighty preamp/processor combi will
make your AV sound grow to enormous size

– prepare to be amazed on page 48. If you can't stretch to
a Krell, there are still mystical experiences to be had with an
affordable AVR from Onkyo, (p68), speakers from Acoustic
Energy (p72), and a round-up of budget Blu-ray players from the
friendly giants of AV (p86).

All this, plus our usual trips down the rabbit-holes of Hollywood
and Japan in our behind-the-scenes industry exposés.

You'd be a Mad Hatter to miss it!

Chris Jenkins

Editor

TEAM HCC

Steve May:

HCC's Editor-in-Chief has a
stunning 20+ years as a CE
journo on his clock



Anton van Beek:

News Ed Anton began his
pro-videophile career over
11 years ago



Mark Craven:

HCC's newly-appointed
Deputy Editor cut his teeth
on the Sub's bench



Chris Jenkins:

Our ISF-calibrated Editor
used to run Future's Tech
Laboratories



John Rook:

Art Editor John first worked
on HCC back in 1999, when
TVs were made of wood



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The latest BD spinners offer more than ever before, but cost less than you might think. Let the budget battle commence!

Sony BDP-S370

Panasonic DMP-BD65

Samsung BD-C6500

LG BD560



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CO-STARRING

This issue's team of expert writers are the best qualified in the business

Adam Rayner:

The UK's foremost expert in extreme audio writes about bass, hi-fi and cartoons



Richard Stevenson:

Industry veteran and former Editor of UK CE trade journal ERT



Jim Hill:

Apple fanatic Hill is the former editor of *T3 Home* and a *What Hi-Fi* escapee



Martin Pipe:

Technology specialist Martin co-developed HCC's Tech Lab operation



John Archer:

The UK's most experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early HCC staffer



Adrian Justins:

Made his name as the editor of *What Video & TV* and *What Home Cinema*



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Ninja Assassin (BD)

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Micmacs (BD)

Crazy Heart (BD)

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The Sky Crawlers (BD)

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BULLETIN

→ **News highlights** **3D DISTRACTION** The BBC keeps its focus on HD **ECLIPSE** Audio brand redesigns its Time Domain floorstanders **SKY VOD** Exclusive look at the satcaster's Anytime+ service **ONKYO** Trio of HDMI v1.4 AVRs to hit stores **LOST** The final season is coming to UK Blu-ray **DEMO'D** One-stop guide to the AV highlights of *Sherlock Holmes*

One in a million

Loewe Individual Slim TVs → www.loewe-uk.com

Not one to rest on its laurels, high-end AV specialist Loewe has launched a slimmer version of its iconic Individual TV. Available in 32-, 40-, 46- and 55in screens, the brand claims that the tailored variations in colour, sound and set-up options, multimedia functions, in-room integration and technical features add up to 'over a million different design options'. Prices start at around £3,400 for the 40in Individual Compose, now available along with the 46in model. The 55in TV follows in July and the 32in set in August.



HCC Online...

Looking for breaking AV news, blogs, features, & reviews? For your daily fix visit us at www.homecinemachoice.com Follow us on Twitter @hccmag

Eclipse Turns Black

Eclipse TDZ712zMK2BK → www.eclipse-td.net

Eclipse's MK2 Black is yet another refinement of the brand's TD712z Time Domain speakers. Priced around £5,300 per pair, the MK2 Black features a more powerful motor for the drive unit, a redesigned damping system, new high-power magnet structure, a 50 per cent larger cabinet and a new integrated stand. Eclipse claims the result is an even faster and more transparent sound, and increased maximum loudness and clarity.



Partner with...

Yamaha RX-V567

3D-Ready 7-channel AVR, £400



You won't need to break the bank to ensure excellent audio processing and full 3D compatibility with Yamaha's latest 7-channel offering. This impressive AVR boasts 3D and Audio Return Channel over HDMI, HD audio decoding with Cinema DSP, video upscaling to 1080p, Auto Lip-Sync compensation and 105W-per-channel amplification. <http://uk.yamaha.com>

Midrange might



Hot on the heels of its budget 3D-ready AVRs, Onkyo has now debuted a trio of THX Select2 Plus-certified

midrange models priced between £800 and £1,300. Sporting HDMI 1.4a connections guaranteeing compatibility with 3D Blu-ray players and TVs, and offering up plenty of network functionality including FLAC-compatible audio streaming and iPod/iPhone album art display, the new AVRs take the form of the 7.2-channel TX-NR708 and TX-NR808, plus the 9.2-channel TX-NR1008 (pictured). www.onkyo.co.uk

Splashdown!



High-end French speaker manufacturer Waterfall Audio is set to make waves in the UK with its

stunning flagship Niagara floorstanders to the UK. Priced at around £25,000 per pair, these eye-catching speakers, covered in hand-stitched Nappa leather, boast a 19mm-thick Diamond Glass enclosure and stand over a metre tall. As for the tech inside the enclosures, each Niagara features custom-built mid/bass Atohm drivers equipped with patented ADT (Acoustic Damping Tube) and a unique Glass Horn Tweeter. www.invisionuk.com

Entering Orbit



Bringing 'cinema quality sound to flatscreen TVs without the need for multiple speakers'

is the bold claim that British audio technology Orbitsound is making for its new T12 v2 soundbar. Priced around £300, the T12 v2 features proprietary spatial stereo technology involving the 'application of heavyweight scientific principles to the positioning of speakers within the unit' to cover the whole room equally to eliminate the sweet spot and create more convincing pseudo-surround audio. www.orbitsound.com

Bose thinks inside the box

5.1 systems pack new software to simplify home cinema

Audio stalwart Bose has launched a quartet of all-in-one 5.1 systems that aim to simplify the home cinema concept to non-tech-hedz.

At the heart of the V-Class and T-Class Lifestyle systems is a new software front-end called Unify, which helps owners connect the speakers and sources, programme the supplied remote to control all their other kit, and eases the whole user experience. It works in a neat and responsive GUI.

Connecting hardware is intended to be foolproof. Owners of one of the new systems simply select 'add source' from the OSD (they will have to work out how to hook up the Bose unit to their TV first, though...) and scroll down a series of options (Blu-ray, Xbox, satellite, etc). Choose one of these and the GUI explains which connection is best (HDMI for Blu-ray, for instance), and displays a diagram showing where it is on the back of the unit. It even shows you what an HDMI cable looks like.

United we stand

The Unify software is updateable, so as new sources arrive in the future, the GUI can change to accommodate them. There's no Ethernet connection, though, so owners will have to download updates from Bose's website onto USB. Bose admitted to *HCC* that it's not yet clear how owners will know when updates are available.

Setting up the Bose remote to control other sources is a matter of pointing your existing handsets at the

Unify software makes kit connection 'foolproof'



Bose head unit, and pressing keys until it's recognised – what Bose calls 'reverse lookup'.

All four systems pack five surround speakers, an Acoustimass subwoofer, and offer room EQ and calibration plus 1080p upscaling over HDMI. Connections on the main console include four HDMI inputs (two front-mounted), component, and analogue fallbacks. Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD audio decoders are present.

The V35 and V25 systems, which also include AM/FM tuners and an iPod dock, are available for £4,500 and £3,500 respectively.

The V35 features Jewel Cube speakers, while the V25 has Direct/Reflecting cabinets. The £2,500 T20 and £2,000 T10 models eschew the tuners and iPod hookup. The former uses the Direct/Reflecting speakers; the latter is specced with Bose's Virtually Invisible surrounds.



Child's play:

Bose systems are ideal for home cinema novices

Playlist...

Team *HCC* reveals its Playback picks of the last month

1 King Boxer (R2 DVD)



The first film to bring Kung-fu to mainstream UK cinema, beautifully remastered. Quentin Tarantino provides a suitably reverential commentary. *SM*

2 Finisterre (R2 DVD)



Paul Kelly's visually superb 2003 doc of London life features a suitably cool soundtrack by indie legends Saint Etienne. *CJ*

3 Ashes to Ashes: Series 3 (R2 DVD)



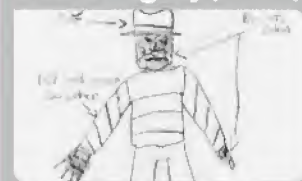
Refire up the Quattro and revisit the fantastic finale of one of the most inventive shows in years. *JR*

4 Bridget Jones's Diary (All-region BD)

This sharp rom-com definitely benefits from Universal Pictures' HD makeover. Next on the BD list is Brit-flick is *Love Actually*. *MC*



5 Never Sleep Again: The Elm Street Legacy (R1 DVD)



Packed full of brand-new interviews with cast and crew from every instalment, this epic, new four-hour doc is the ultimate tribute to Freddy Krueger. *AvB*



Demo'd!

The AV highlights of... *Sherlock Holmes* on Blu-ray

Bite the bullet



07.12: Gunshots come with a serious bass kick, setting out the stall of the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix.

Detailed description



15.42: A fight full of delineated detailing, thanks to the excellent VC-11.85:1 1080p encode.

Ooh la la



55.29: As Holmes scraps a French giant, debris crashes around you courtesy of the Blu-ray's epic DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 mix.

Slow burner



83.41: Slow-motion 1080p imagery once again reveals a staggering amount of fine detail.

Tower of strength



107.58: As the action shifts to the top of Tower Bridge, the quality of the high-definition visuals come to the fore once again, making the most of the hyper-detailed production design and visual effects.

BBC: '3D is a distraction'

Broadcaster's focus remains resolutely high-definition for now

Television manufacturers may all be in a tiz about 3D and its benefits in the home, but the BBC is staying cautious about its third dimensional stance.

Speaking recently at the 3DTV World Forum, Danielle Nagler, head of HD at the BBC, was less full of praise about the format, more weary that it was taking the limelight away from HD.

'We are excited about the developments of 3D but we need to see what the long term benefits of 3D to broadcasters are before we commit,' Nagler noted. 'At the moment, 3D for us is a distraction from HD. There is still a lot of work to do in explaining HD to consumers – the focus on 3D technology, in that sense, is not helpful.'

The BBC's main focus remains on high-definition – something which was underlined with the recent announcement that BBC One will be making the move to HD in the autumn.

This isn't to say that the BBC isn't experimenting with 3D, however. Earlier this year, its engineers broadcasted a Six Nations rugby match in 3D and showcased it live at London's O2 arena. But Nagler was keen to point out that 3D may well stay as a niche format.

'HD and CGI have enhanced storytelling, but we do not yet know what the answer is for 3D,' she explained.

'Regular consumption of 3D television on a regular public access channel is something still open to question.'



Danielle Nagler, head of HD at the BBC, says that 3D is a 'distraction' at the moment

With Sky readying its 3D channel for a full launch this year, it is hoping that 3D will become mainstream sooner rather than later. However, with money coming from subscriptions and advertising, Sky can allow the channel to be a loss maker for the short term.

This is a luxury the BBC cannot afford, as Nagler says: '[the BBC] has virtually no money to spend on 3D television; our core commitment is on general programming... 3D is not the best use of limited license payer money.'

Going for gold

If 3D is the success that many in the home entertainment industry is gambling on, then it is inevitable that the BBC will have to commit to the format at some point. Although the broadcaster remains tight-lipped about any 3D plans, it did hint about its plans for the London 2012 Olympics.

'3D is about theatre,' added Nagler. 'We are

keen to capture some of the Olympics in 3D and we would like to do the first ever live Olympic transmissions, including the opening ceremony.'

We'd better start preparing to dodge those 3D javelins now.



Warner goes ape



Citing the success of classics *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind* on Blu-ray, and a desire 'not to wait

and withhold this seminal film from the marketplace', Warner Home Video has revealed that it is bringing the original 1933 *King Kong*, to Blu-ray in the US on September 28. Arriving in DigiBook packaging, the disc features a remastered 1080p transfer of the film, plus the commentary track, trailers and documentaries that featured on the 2005 Special Edition DVD, including *The Making of Kong*, *Eighth Wonder of the World*.

www.warnerbros.com

Repo mania



High-concept, adrenalin-fuelled sci-fi thriller *Repo Men*, starring Jude Law and Forrest

Whitaker, appears on DVD and Blu-ray in the UK on August 23 courtesy of Universal Pictures. An organ donation tale with a grim twist, the film is accompanied on both formats by deleted scenes with optional commentary, VFX progressions and a director's commentary. The Blu-ray is bolstered by U-Control picture-in-picture content and the usual Universal roster of BD-Live, My Scenes and pocketBlu functionality.

www.universalpictures.com

We are the robots



Eureka Entertainment has revealed early details about the Blu-ray release of the new restoration

of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* that will be arriving in the UK towards the end of the year. Part of the company's Masters of Cinema Series (HCC's Label of the Year award 2009), the disc features the newly restored 150min cut of the film, plus a feature-length commentary, 2010 documentary *Die Reise nach Metropolis*, with more extras to be announced close to release. It will also ship with a lavish, 56-page booklet featuring new essays, and archival interviews.

www.mastersofcinema.org

Found!

Lost: The Complete Sixth Season → Walt Disney Home Entertainment → R2 DVD & Region B Blu-ray

The final season of the hottest cult series of the Noughties comes to DVD and Blu-ray in the UK on September 20. And even if you've already seen the show on Sky One, fans will still want to track down these feature-packed boxsets, not least for their exclusive new epilogue, which executive producers Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse claim will open the window on a previously unseen part of the island's history...



Pick'n'Mix

Actor
Marshall
Lancaster
picks his
five
favourite movies...



1 One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Jack Nicholson heads up an incredible cast in this moving yet comical film classic.

2 The Godfather

I love Mario Puzo's books and this film is just brilliant. I love how the film shows subtle political shifts in the Italian Mafia.

3 Groundhog Day

I think this is a really clever and funny film... I really think this is a really clever and funny film...

4 E.T.

Hate to admit it, but Spielberg can make me cry over a little rubber alien. How does he do it?

5 Flash Gordon

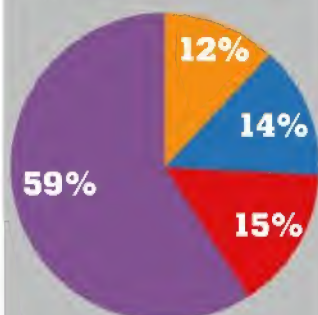
'Hawkmen, DIVE!!!'. I watch it nearly every Christmas.

Macclesfield-born actor Marshall Lancaster has been a regular on British TV since 1999, appearing in acclaimed shows including *The Lakes* and *Clocking Off*. He's best known for playing DC Chris Skelton in *Life on Mars* and *Ashes to Ashes*. The third and final series of *Ashes to Ashes* hits DVD on July 6, priced £40, courtesy of E! Entertainment.

We asked...

Which of the following do you think will primarily drive the adoption of 3D AV kit at home?

- 3D Blu-rays
- 3D TV channels
- 3D videogames
- None of them: 3D is a gimmick that will never take off at home



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

Sky's 'DVD boxset approach'

Upcoming VOD service raises the game of Anytime Push TV

Sky plans to significantly evolve its current Sky Anytime Push TV service later this year with the launch of its first Video on Demand set-top box service. Dubbed Anytime+, it will allow users to Pull 'thousands of hours' of material to their screens whenever they want.

During an exclusive hands-on with the service, HCC spoke to Kathryn Downward, Sky's Head of TV Services, to learn how it differs from existing rivals. 'Anytime+ access will mirror your existing subscription package. There will be no additional charge. At launch we will offer around 500 movies. We're also looking to introduce a DVD boxset approach to TV shows. We think people will enjoy catching up on entire seasons of TV shows they love'.

Making use of the Ethernet connection on the Sky+ HD set-top boxes, Anytime+ is not a streaming VOD service, but rather a Partial Download one. This, says Sky, is the best way to deliver VOD across a network of potentially quite slow copper wire broadband. Unfortunately, for that reason it will also be standard-definition only. That said, the satcaster hasn't ruled out talking to other ISPs at some point in the future.

The new Anytime+ interface is very different from the existing listings grid visuals. Programmes have thumbnail art and scroll horizontally across the screen – resulting in a very intuitive experience.



Sky's Kathryn Downward tells us that the service will launch with 500 or so movies

Pulled items sport a small Play icon, indicating that they can be watched. This appears when either enough of a show has been downloaded and buffered to ensure smooth playback, as well as when a file is fully downloaded and resident on the box. All downloaded VOD content sits in the main Planner section of the hard drive.

Pull programming can also be scheduled – meaning users can download content overnight – and users can manage download timings via the menus to help manage bandwidth issues.

'We want the viewing experience to be exactly the same as with regular TV watching. All the standard playback functionality is retained. There won't be any stuttering and buffering,' says David Kelly, Sky's Senior Product Development Manager.

Sky refuses to be drawn on what other services could be introduced now that the Ethernet functionality of its set-top box has been awakened. Although Sky's Development Manager did confirm that 'the move opens up' the possibility of networking content around a house to client boxes. Maybe that will be one for Sky's 2012 road map.



On the menu: Intuitive Anytime+ listings

Going native



Building on the success of its bestselling HD65 projector, Optoma has launched a

replacement native 720p model, the £600 HD67, which it claims, 'brings the amazing cinematic performance of the latest digital projector technology to the home at an affordable price point'. The lightweight 2.3kg HD67 features 1080p24 frame support, 1800 ANSI Lumens brightness and 400:1 ANSI contrast ratio. Optoma is so confident of its picture performance that it offers a five year colour quality guarantee. www.optoma.co.uk

Hub-a-dub-dub



Integrated Entertainment Systems Limited (IES) is the latest manufacturer to

try to win over consumers with a combined TV stand and sound system. Its new Opus and Quantum mi-hub units can hold a TV up to 60in in size, and feature an integrated 1080p upscaling DVD player, an iPod dock, 4x 4in 10W L/R speakers, 2x 20W 5in sub speakers, integrated Dolby Digital AC-3 decoder, PII AM/FM radio, a clock and even two microphone ports. Prices run between £400 and £460.

www.mi-hub.co.uk

Sonic boom



ViewSonic Europe has introduced a feature-packed new digital media player that promises

to turn any HDTV into a digital entertainment centre and 'can play anything and do it very, very well' according to European marketing manager James Coulson. Priced in the region of £140, the VMP74 incorporates a Sigma Designs SMP8655AD chipset to deliver its AV content, which can be displayed at 1080p and features a built-in SPDIF connection for use with digital audio systems.

www.viewsoniceurope.com/uk

This month's top ten news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...

1 Armless fun
3D cinemas in France are suffering from a weird problem according to Maria Costeira, CEO of XpanD, which supplies active shutter 3D glasses to over 80 per cent of the cinemas in the country. Speaking to *HCC* she revealed, 'In France, we have a special replacement program for arm pieces. Only the right arm pieces. People eat the arm pieces! This is a serious problem'. Cinema snacks cost a lot these days, but come on...



a small chance that 220/240V versions of the A-760, A-760II, A-960, A-960II, A-1060, M-50, M-70 and B-6 models can develop small faults in the power supplies, potentially leading to fires. For more info contact Yamaha on +44 (0) 1908 369213, send an email to service@yamaha.de or visit <http://uk.yamaha.com/en/support/>.

2 Lap it up
We're still waiting for Toshiba to start talking about a 3D Blu-ray deck (but then, think how long it took them to get a regular 2D one on the market). But while we wait, the company has announced that its new TX/98MBL notebook PC model dynabook laptop will be the first in the world to feature 3D Blu-ray playback using Active Shutter glasses when it goes on sale in Japan later this Summer...

3 It's a wrap
Sony has invented a super-thin, ultra-flexible new OLED technology that can be wrapped around a cylinder. Thanks to some complex scientific stuff involving Organic Thin-Film Transistors and peri-Xanthenoxanthene, the company has conjured up a super-flexible 80 micrometre-thick 4.1inch wide display with a resolution of 121ppi (pixels per inch) that can reproduce a moving image while rolled up and stretched over 1,000 times.

4 JC ties knot with Samsung
James Cameron continues to whore himself around every 3DTV manufacturer, having now signed a partnership with Samsung to promote its 3D kit. 'In some ways, Avatar will actually look better on [Samsung] televisions than it did in movie theatres,' he claimed. Whatever you say Jim...

5 Genuinely certifiable
Corel WinDVD, apparently the world's most widely used DVD playback software, has received Blu-ray 3D Certification from the BDA. Corel says that customers who own Corel WinDVD Pro 2010 will receive Frame Sequential, Polarization and Anaglyph 3D capabilities with a free update later this year.

6 Partial recall
Yamaha has issued a safety notice on seven hi-fi amplifiers built between 1980 and 1982. It's been discovered that there's

7 Sony bit by Google TV bug
Sony has confirmed that it is working on a range of TVs and Blu-ray-based set-top boxes based around the new Google TV platform. Due to launch this Autumn in the US, the range is designed to allow consumers to search and watch 'an expanded universe of content available from a variety of sources including TV provides, the web, their personal content libraries and mobile applications'.

8 Second helping
The BBC's second hi-def offering will be a simulcast of its flagship BBC One channel. As part of its launch, the Corporation will move a number of its top-rated TV shows to hi-def including super-soap *EastEnders*, quiz *QI*, drama *Holby*, magazine hit *The One Show* and reality blockbuster *The Apprentice*.

9 Fire up the Quattron!
Sharp has finally jumped aboard the 3D bandwagon, announcing its first range of 3D-ready Quattron TVs, promising to have 50 per cent of its range 3D-ready by the end of the 2011 financial year. The first ten 3D models should hit Japan at the end of July.

10 Hit 'em where it hurts
The producers behind *The Hurt Locker* have teamed up with a law firm known as The Copyright Group to sue tens of thousands of people suspected of illegally downloading the award-winning movie from BitTorrent sites. Unsurprisingly, the news has made the thieving dolts who endorse downloading films for free very angry.



'Take that, you illegal downloader'

Premiere

HCC's guide to what's happening in the world of TV and films...

Del Toro quits Shire



Given the problems surrounding MGM, it's no surprise to learn that after two-years' pre-production, Guillermo Del Toro will no longer be directing *The Hobbit*. The filmmaker is citing the delays on the film's production and pre-existing commitments with Universal for his decision to leave.

Me and my big mouth

At a recent investor event, Warner Bros. chairman and CEO Barry Meyer let slip release dates for the company's forthcoming blockbusters. Next year will see *Green Lantern* on June 17, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part II* on July 15 and *Sherlock Holmes 2* in mid-December. He also teased July 20, 2012, for *Batman 3*, and 'holiday season', 2012 for a new *Superman* film.

Monky business



Martial arts superstar Tony Jaa has reportedly quit the movie business. The Thai star of the *Ong-Bak* movies apparently rode an elephant to a temple in Surin and has been ordained as a Buddhist Monk. It almost sounds like a plot of one of his films...

Turtle shell out

Cowabunga, dudes! It's now been confirmed that Michael Bay and his Platinum Dunes colleagues will be producing Paramount's live-action reboot of the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*.

Sealed with an X

X-Men: First Class, Matthew Vaughn's reboot of the comic book franchise, has hit the ground running in order to meet its June 2011 release date. The latest news is that *Wanted* star James McAvoy is to play a younger incarnation of Professor X.

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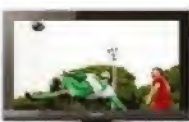
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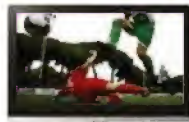


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POINT OF VIEW

When it comes to AVR power claims, **Richard Stevenson** warns that you should take everything with an industrial-sized bag of salt

Manufacturers have always played a little fast and loose with the truth. Somewhere in the handbook *Marketing for Dummies* it must say that adding a few dB here, a few Watts there or quoting metrics measured in ways to illicit the best figures are legitimate tactics for the modern marketer. Perhaps because sales are rather slow at the moment, when it comes to ambitious claims, manufacturers are getting like a bunch of hormonal teenagers discussing the size of their tackle.

All AV product sectors suffer this 'mine-is-bigger-than-yours' rhetoric, but AV amplifier brands are in a league of their own. Power output is the cornerstone of outrageous declarations, with chasm-sized discrepancies between makers' claims and the measured results in our Tech Labs. And if taking liberties with the truth were not enough, prime offenders use smoke and mirrors too. Quoting power output into anything lower than an 8Ω speaker load, using anything less than a full-range 20kHz-20kHz signal and running anything other than all channels driven, will produce a ridiculously high looking power figure.

Top-class practitioners in this black art go so far as implementing all three tactics, quoting maximum power output into a 6Ω load, using a 1kHz signal with just one or two channels driven. I'm not one to name and shame, but you know who you are Onkyo, Pioneer, Sony, and Yamaha. Be warned when you read their specification sheets.

This goes up to 11

A recent addition to the repertoire of trump claims is the number of channels the amplifier supports. Oh, 7.1 is so yesterday's news. Looking down the current crop of amps and receivers I can see 7.2, 7.3, 9.1, 9.2, 9.3 and even 11.3 channels. Okay, with the advent of Dolby ProLogic II and Audyssey DSX processing one could perhaps legitimately claim 9.1 or even 11.1 channels. However, it is the .2

and .3 specifications that are getting my gander up – and many of the same manufactures are guilty as charged.

Offering two or three parallel subwoofer outputs does not increase the number of channels or part channels to 7.2 or 7.3. It produces the same bass from two or three subs, so is actually just .1. If simply adding more speakers did increase channel numbers then **my maddest system ever would have been 16.10**. I was using four-speaker arrays for rears and centre, plus normal main and rear back pairs, a sub on each of the seven channels and three LFE subs. That was a 7.1 system mirroring a commercial cinema array set-up. It worked, too, although I single-handedly raised the global price of copper by using so many miles of speaker cable.

Some top-end AV amps and receivers now offer independent EQ, phase adjustment and level for more than one subwoofer output. Each sub in such a system is fed a subtly different signal, but does that make each subwoofer worthy of its own additional .1 moniker? I'm honestly not sure.

It would be easy to say 'no' because the underlying signal feed is a single off-source LFE channel and the amplifier's multiple sub outputs are simply modified derivatives of that one signal. Conversely, DPL IIz Height and Audyssey DSX have already gained their own channel numbers despite the fact that the additional channel signals are simply modified derivatives of the original 7.1 source. So perhaps 'yes'.

In which case, it could be argued that as every subwoofer fed the same signal (and every speaker fed from the same channel) produces a subtly different sound due to positioning and acoustics, they are all independent channels. Therefore, ergo and QED, my 16.10 channel tackle is clearly bigger than any amplifier manufacturer's.

Do you think some manufacturer's spec claims are fantastic? Let us know: email hcc@futurenet.com

Richard Stevenson's hobbies include playing giant-sized Jenga in the garden using his endless collection of loudspeakers

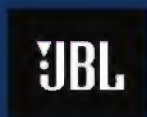




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DVD ADDICT

This month, **The Beek** thinks the unthinkable and ponders whether *HCC* should be covering the games we play on our AV systems

The Summer months are always tough on our home cinema systems. Despite the cash we pour into upgrading and tweaking them, the first glimpse of sun and the hint of temperatures spiking above 18 degrees for a few months ensures that they become a secondary concern.

And if it's not the rumours of hot weather that turns our heads, it's the paucity of big flashy movies being released on DVD and Blu-ray. While multiplexes around the globe rumble to the latest Hollywood blockbusters like *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*, *The A-Team* and *Toy Story 3*, the predictable nature of the home entertainment release schedule means that shop shelves are packed full of serious dramas that hit cinemas in the first few months of the year to capitalise on their Oscar buzz. Think *Crazy Heart* and *Invictus*.

Very worthy films, it must be said, but not ideal if you're hunting for some kind of vicarious Hollywood blockbuster thrill.

Games are coming home

Thankfully, owning both an Xbox 360 and a PlayStation 3 console has meant that even during this quiet period for movies, I've fed my cinema system with a constant stream of adrenaline-charged blockbuster action, delivering pretty much everything it craved.

First up, there was *Split/Second: Velocity*, a shallow but brilliantly destructive racing game that is equal parts *Burnout*, *Ridge Racer* and Michael Bay blockbuster. It combines ear-splitting surround audio with some of the most detailed and smooth hi-def graphics I've ever seen. Meanwhile, triggering the Power Play mode sends explosions ripping through the surrounding buildings as you try to take out your opponents. It's a real thrill ride.

At the other end of the spectrum, there's *Red Dead Redemption*. Essentially *Grand Theft Wild West*, this ridiculously addictive game has allowed me to wrangle horses, shoot bandits, win poker games in sleazy saloons, hunt wolves, collect flowers (don't ask), and ride in a posse, all set to one of the best dynamic Leone-inspired music soundtracks in gaming history. Who needs another big Hollywood sequel when I can spend hours indulging in the Wild West fantasies I've developed after decades of watching the films of Howard Hawks, John Ford, Sergio Leone and Sam Peckinpah (and the game references pretty much all of them).

Of course, having worked on this mag for the almost five years, I know I'm hardly alone in having games consoles hooked into my AV setup. Indeed, how many of you are still using a PS3 within your home cinema?

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 set the world record for the best launch in the history of the entertainment industry last November – that's movies,

games, music, the lot – grossing \$401.6million in a day. It raises an obvious question. As a mag devoted to the ultimate in home entertainment, should *HCC* be covering – at least in some small way – the big video games titles that many of you will be playing on your AV systems? Or are you happy to leave that kind of thing to our website, where it won't eat into the space being used for DVD and Blu-ray reviews?

For a change, I'm not advocating either – both have their merits and drawbacks. But as a home cinema enthusiast who, like many of you, also uses his system for gaming, I'd certainly be interested to hear what you think on the subject.

Should Home Cinema Choice be covering HD games? Let us know: email hcc@futurenet.com

Anton van Beek has recently taken to sporting no more than a stetson and gun holster to the office. His position is under review





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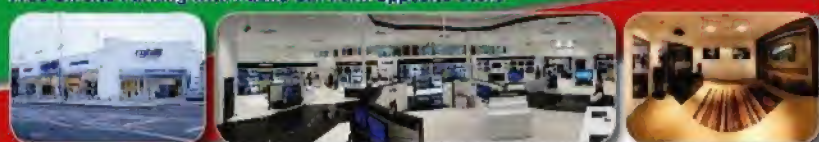
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TIME MACHINES

There was more to the '80s video format war than VHS and Betamax.

Martin Pipe revisits Video 2000

Back in 1963, Philips launched an audio revolution that is only now fading away – the compact cassette. There had been other attempts at making sound-recording more convenient than reel-to-reel, but Philips' invention was by far the most successful. Originally intended for use as a dictation machine, the Philips cassette didn't need to be threaded up. And you could record on the other side of the cassette by ejecting it and flipping it over.

During the 1970s, the compact cassette became a global success, so it was no surprise to see it used for domestic video recording. We're all familiar with Sony's Betamax format (launched in 1975) and JVC's VHS (launched in '76) – but behind the scenes, Philips – and its European competitor Grundig – were working on a new home video format. Not any old format, but the world's most advanced, called Video 2000.

This V2000 system, like the audio compact cassette, could be flipped over; Betamax and VHS, in contrast, were resolutely single-sided. Recording times were no longer a problem, a VCC (Video Compact Cassette) 480 offered four hours of recording per side. Another major advance was Dynamic Track Following, in which the two video heads were mounted on piezoelectric elements. Electronics would 'bend' this element up or down so that the heads followed their respective tracks. As a result, there was no tracking control. In addition, you got noiseless trick-speed playback – something that only came into widespread availability with DVD.

Launched in the UK in 1980, the Philips VR2020 VCR was controlled by 8bit microprocessors. It had soft-touch buttons instead of the mechanical levers of their contemporaries. Another neat trick was the 'go-to' function. Simply enter the count corresponding to the start of a recorded programme, provided you'd noted it down, and the machine would spool to it. Over time, the format

added extra features. A half-speed mode found on some late machines would yield up to 16 hours per cassette – a feat never surpassed by any analogue format. Linear stereo audio was subsequently added, but **the manufacturers were beaver away on a far-superior PCM digital audio system.**

Unfortunately, such innovation never made it beyond the lab stage. V2000 failed to match the success of the audio cassette, and was commercially-dead by 1986. It only achieved popularity in Europe – most of the second-hand V2000 VCRs on eBay tend to lurk in Germany or the Netherlands – while VHS and Betamax were worldwide phenomena. And this was despite manipulation of the European market, through import duties and even the deliberate channelling of imported VCRs through a tiny port. So why did it fail? The very first V2000-format machines lacked trick playback modes, thereby failing to live up to the promise of DTF. Then there was the reliability; in an early-80s survey, V2000 hardware lagged behind the competition. Picture and sound quality could also be mediocre, and there were early issues with inter-machine compatibility.

Over time these criticisms were addressed, but the writing was already on the wall for V2000. By 1984 the Japanese formats, with VHS firmly in the lead, were firmly entrenched. Another nail in the format's coffin was the scarcity of pre-recorded tapes. V2000 owners, unlike VHS fans, tended to return from the local video rental shop empty-handed. In the UK, where V2000 was always in third place, remaining stocks of hardware were sold off cheaply by mid-80s retailers. Great for those looking for a second VCR, but bad news for Philips and Grundig. The V2000 format, for which Philips had such high hopes, didn't make the 1990s – never mind the third millennium.

Did you own a V2000 recorder? What were your experiences? Let us know: email hcc@futurenet.com

Technological boundary-pusher **Martin Pipe** is currently building a hat that can record 5.1 audio. Next stop, *Dragon's Den*



Tech diary

The world of AV and film changes fast. **Our calendar** means you don't miss out

The A Team:
Storming
cinemas
from
July 28



Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
				2  Splice <i>Frankenstein</i> meets <i>Species</i> in this slick-looking sci-fi chiller starring Adrien Brody and Sarah Polley, who create an oddly sexy human/animal hybrid. In UK cinemas from today www.splicethefilm.com	3  'This is the end...' The Doors' 27-year-old lead singer Jim Morrison was found dead in a bathtub at his Paris apartment by his girlfriend Pamela Courson on this day in 1971	4  Fourth of July It's all fireworks, picnics and barbecues in the US today as the country celebrates Independence Day. Depending on your taste in films, you could always mark the date by watching <i>ID4</i> or <i>Born on the Fourth of July</i>
5  Generation Kill HBO continues the slow process of bringing its many hit TV series to Blu-ray with the arrival in the UK of this acclaimed Iraq war mini-series on the hi-def format www.hbo.com/generation-kill	6  R.I.P. US filmmaker John Frankenheimer died from a stroke today in 2002, aged 72, leaving behind a spectacular body of work including <i>The Manchurian Candidate</i> , <i>Birdman of Alcatraz</i> , <i>Grand Prix</i> and <i>Ronin</i>			9  The Twilight Saga: Eclipse The popular teen vampire series takes another bite out of UK cinemas today, but this time we're hoping that director David '30 Days of Night' Slade can bring a little horror to the franchise www.eclipsethemovie.com	10  Telstar The first communication satellite able to relay TV signals, telephone calls, and fax images through space, Telstar 1, was launched on this day in 1962. It remained operation until February 21 the following year.	11  To Kill a Mockingbird Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> was first published on this day in 1960. Considered a classic of modern American literature, it was quickly adapted for the big screen in 1962
12  Valentine's Day Keep the lady in your life sweet by picking up this rom-com when it hits DVD and BD in the UK today. And with a cast including Jessica Biel and Jessica Alba there's plenty to keep guys interested as well www.valentinesdaymovie.com				16  Inception Filmmaker Christopher Nolan is back with this sci-fi flick about entering the dreams of other people. Can it do <i>Dark Knight</i> -scale box office? Find out when it opens at UK cinemas today http://inceptionmovie.warnerbros.com		18  Happy Birthday Geek-favourite and one-time 'World's Sexiest Vegetarian' Kristen Bell was born today in 1980. Check her out in TV shows like <i>Veronica Mars</i> and <i>Heroes</i> , or in movies like J-horror remake <i>Pulse</i> and <i>Forgetting Sarah Marshall</i>
19  The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo This adaptation of the first part of Stieg Larsson's trilogy of crime novels was a box office hit, and should do well again when it arrives on DVD and BD in the UK www.thegirlwiththedragontattoo.co.uk	20  Operation Valkyrie Adolf Hitler survived an assassination attempt on this day in 1944. To learn more, check out the surprisingly good Tom Cruise movie about the events, <i>Valkyrie</i> on DVD and Blu-ray	21  Toy Story 3 Buzz, Woody and friends return to cinemas across the UK today with this long-awaited third part in the Pixar franchise. Take your pick from 2D and 3D versions of the film, with the latter also playing at IMAX screens http://disney.go.com/toystory/	22  Comic Con International The San Diego Convention Center again plays host to middle-aged men dressed as superheroes as the four-day comic book and movie convention opens its doors today www.comic-con.org			
26  Picnic at Hanging Rock A classic of Australian cinema, Peter Weir's spellbinding and dreamlike 1975 film about a group of schoolgirls who disappear without a trace makes its way to the UK on Blu-ray		28  The A-Team Yet another '80s TV series heads to the big screen, courtesy of director Joe Carnahan's effects-laden blockbuster following the exploits of an all-new Hannibal, B.A., Faceman, and 'Howling Mad' Murdock www.ateam-movie.com	29  HCC #185 Start saving your pennies for HCC #185. Your favourite home cinema magazine hits the stands this Thursday, packed to the gills with hardware tests, features, outspoken opinion and full-on software reviews www.homecinemachoice.com			

SHARP



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The SOUND of cinema

Sony's new AV receivers are better equipped than ever. **Steve May** pricks up his ears



The sound of Sony: Chief Distinguished Engineer Takashi Kanai is the visionary behind Sony's sonic innovations



The STR-DA5500ES AV receiver may look much like its predecessors, but beneath the angular hood are significant changes to how Sony's engineering gurus approach everything from DSP post-processing to speaker matching.

Deep in the company's famed listening rooms, located in the company's imposing Tech building in Shinagawa Tokyo, I'm getting an exclusive insight into the making of this beast. My guides are Sony's Chief Distinguished Engineer Takashi Kanai, audio division chief Motoyuki Sugiura and UK product specialist Eric Kingdon.

'We think that Automatic Phase Matching is critical to home cinema calibration,' explains Kingdon, 'and the first AVR to get it is the DA5500ES. The phase of a loudspeaker is really important to the character of the sound. In a stereo configuration, correct phase allows the cabinet to disappear and the soundstage to be accurate, and completely natural. In a multichannel surround sound system it becomes even more important. The unfortunate reality is listeners are rarely lucky enough to have five (or seven) loudspeakers with the same phase character and phase response. In many cases the surrounds are not the same at all.'

Public image limited

For a sound system to image correctly, all the speakers should have the same phase characteristics. 'If you use different surround speakers to what you use at the front, then you could have a problem,' warns Kingdon. 'When one drive unit is moving in a different direction to the

other, it can be a disaster. The soundstage won't be coherent. You can't spatially feel or locate all the subtle effects of a movie experience. We set out to solve that problem – and that's what APM does.'

The processing technology behind APM is incredibly sophisticated.

More than just phase correction, it is able to compensate for speaker characteristics created by acoustic design, whether the speakers are full-range or horn types. But what if a speaker design intentionally uses an out-of-phase design?

'That's not a problem,' explains Sugiura. 'We've tested the system with Wilson Benesch floorstanders which use a design where the bass-mid-range unit is out-of-phase to the main tweeter. They don't sound out-of-phase because that's the way they've been designed to image, but our APM system understands that. Bowers and Wilkins, by way of comparison, use an in-phase design. So if you put the two together, you would expect to have an issue. But with APM we can correct the problem and integrate both types of speakers.'

Sony's audio chief is quick to stress that there's nothing intrinsically wrong with an out-of-phase design. 'But it's only now that you can correct for it in a multichannel, multi-speaker type setup.'

The other big change to the audio processing within the DA5500ES is in its DSP modes. For a number of years, Sony AVRs have offered a variety of acoustic patterns which purport to replicate the sound stages of its Hollywood mixing studios, as



well as other key venues. But these original algorithms have been based on measurements made with (what now seems) crude kit.

The unit's new DSP has been refined – and there is now only one cinema soundfield, that of the Cary Grant Theatre at Sony Pictures Studios in Culver City. 'We measured the dubbing stage using a brand new eight-point microphone which uses very small capsules to minimise reflections (the original was a four-point mic). It can also record at much higher resolution – 96KHz/24bit,' explains Kanai-san. 'This new eight-point system was engineered by us and

designed in house here at Sony; it can make over 500 different measurements. Using this we could rapidly build up a huge database of the character within the dubbing theatre itself.'

Once mapped, the Sony engineers identified which data was relevant to the AVR's DSP, and developed software able to emulate the measured soundfield within any listening room.

Chops away

To demonstrate the AVR's musical chops, Kanai-san spins the title track from Shelby Lynne's Dusty Springfield tribute album, *Just a* ➤

Elevated Standard:
The STR-DA5500ES is the first Sony AVR to feature Automatic Phase Matching (APM)



Ready to serve: With twin HDMI outputs, Sony's high-end AVR can feed both a TV and projector



Little Lovin'. The AVR delivers a close-mic'd, intimate sound that beautifully articulates Lynne's subtle vocals. The source is the brand's XA5400ES SACD player delivering uncompressed DSD (Direct Stream Digital) via HDMI to the DA5500ES. There is no post-processing. I'm left with little doubt that this AVR is comfortable in the role of high-fidelity component.

Then to demonstrate the new DSP we swap SACD for Blu-ray, and several sequences from *Immortal Beloved*. Comparative A/B demos reveal a fuller, more spatially aware soundfield. Exterior storm clouds move slightly from L/C/R to mid-room. As an example of the DA5500ES's dynamics, *No Country for Old Men* is used to blow the roof off the place.

Over the years, there has been ongoing debate about the value of DSP acoustic implementations in AVRs. Perhaps because DSP modes have become commonplace, their veracity has been questioned. Straw polls usually give DSP modes the thumbs down.

Kanai has a different view. 'Acoustic DSP processing can actually correct bad sound design, which is commonplace in many movie soundtracks,' he argues.

As an example he plays a sequence from the Blu-ray of *Ghost Rider*, starring Nicolas Cage.

Plans revealed: Kanai-san and Eric Kingdon reveal the schematics behind the DA5500ES

Sony's best kept secret – revisited

The company's SS-AR speakers are the best-sounding loudspeakers you've never heard



The SS-AR2 speakers were demo'd with Japanese soprano Maki Mori and Super Audio CDs from the PentaTone Classics label

In Chapter 11, 1 hour 12 minutes in, Cage's character is confronted in an alleyway by the law. When the cops arrive, there's a clear reverb as sirens, guns and dialogue echo in the confines of the alley. But when Blaze is placed under arrest, the atmospheric echo inexplicably vanishes.

Kanai runs the same sequence using the DA5500ES' dubbing theatre DSP mode, which subjectively overlays its own cinematic atmospherics, and the inconsistent sound design in the original movie is convincingly disguised. The incredible disappearing reverb effect, which pulls you out of the film, has been removed and the cinematic illusion is undamaged.

You're surrounded

One new surround sound feature not present on the DA5500ES is width and height processing, either as a proprietary mode or licensed from Audyssey or Dolby.

'Of course we are interested in these technologies,' says Kanai-san, 'but rather than increase once again the number of speakers required in a listening room, our intention is to focus on providing correct sound within the current multichannel environment.'

The Chief Engineer is not convinced people will rush to add more enclosures to their room, and he has a point. 'Stereo fans already find it difficult to contemplate more than two speakers, while those who enjoy multichannel sound are



unlikely to add yet more. The real challenge is to draw those customers who only have two speakers into an existing multichannel environment.' For that to happen, he concludes, we have to convince them that multichannel Blu-ray really does take hi-fi to another next level.

To prove his point he uses plays a multichannel classical Blu-ray recording featuring the inspirational Japanese conductor Seiji Ozawa. The DA5500ES creates a soundstage of undeniable power and beauty. The hairs rise on the back of my neck.

Takashi Kanai, Motoyuki Sugiura and Eric Kingdon nod in satisfaction. They know that they've proved their point ♦

Cable compromise:

Sony wants to convince stereophiles that multichannel Blu-ray music is worth all the extra wires

The last time *HCC* visited Sony's audio division in Tokyo, we were treated to a stunning session with the brand's best-kept secret – its high-end, high-price SS-AR1 speakers. This year we're treated to the SS-AR2. Introduced at the tail-end of last year, these are smaller, and more affordable (cough) variants typically sell for around £6,000 apiece, tipping the scale at (just) 38kg and standing 980mm tall, they're a more realistic option for domestic use.

Like their siblings, the speakers are built using Hokkaido maple, and birch from Finland, 'to make the sound warmer,' says audio division chief Motoyuki Sugiura. Build quality is exquisite. The Japanese-made cabinets each take around a month to construct, and that's without the sanding and a painting process.

Internally, a significant portion of the cabinet is turned over to the mid-range; isolation techniques, which include doubled-up birch boards (think cavity insulation), enhance performance. Drive units, which comprise a 1in soft-dome tweeter, 5in midrange driver and two 6.5in aluminium-cone woofers, are supplied by Scan Speak.

'If a woofer is too big, their reaction time can be too slow,' says audio division chief Motoyuki Sugiura, 'so we've gone for two mid-size woofers. It's a better solution, but the drivers must move accurately together, with the same timing to sound good.'

And sound good they do. Although slightly downsized from the SS-AR1, the AR2s have the same characteristic landscape openness, with a supernatural mid-range.

Of course, the stumbling block remains availability. The SS-AR2s are currently unavailable outside of Japan. Quite why Sony insists on hiding these blinding lights under a bushel remains a cruel mystery.



SS-AR2 speaker designer Yoshiyuki Kaku poses with his latest babies



Anton van Beek
salutes a man from
Down Under who now
rules over Hollywood

Highway to Mel

For 23 year-old Mel Columcille Gerard Gibson, 1979 was to be an incredible year. Following several stints on stage and TV in Australia, this would be the year in which Mel Gibson would finally make it onto the big screen, launching him to stardom with a pair of Australian movies that would also highlight the fascinating dichotomy that seems to exist in his screen persona, one that makes him popular with all types of audiences.

On the one hand there was the romantic drama *Tim*, which saw him impress the critics and pick up an Australian Film Institute award for his portrayal of a developmentally challenged young man. On the other was George Miller's dystopian action film *Mad Max*, which saw him thrill action fans as he dished out grisly revenge for the murder of his wife and child as the leather-clad 'Mad' Max Rockatansky.

And therein lies the crux to Gibson's eventual superstardom. He's a good-looking guy with plenty of rough edges, a truly charismatic and versatile actor with genuine 'star quality', who is every bit at home in a serious drama as he is in bringing depth and gravitas to straight-up action films. Indeed, it seems that United Press

International Hollywood correspondent and columnist Vernon Scott hit the nail on the head when he described Gibson as 'a combination of Clark Gable and Humphrey Bogart' in the 1983 article *Mel Gibson: Australia's New Hunk*.

Chapter and controversy

Even controversy has failed to dim Gibson's star. From accusations of homophobia to speculation about anti-Semitism in his religious beliefs and a notorious alcohol-fuelled run-in with the law, the star has often made the news for all of the wrong reasons. And, yet, that talent keeps us flocking to his films – whether acting or directing.

While *The Man without a Face* and, especially, *Braveheart* showcased some talent as a director, it was 2004's *The Passion of the Christ* and 2006's *Apocalypto* that showed his incredible ability and willingness to experiment behind the camera.

Even if he isn't as prolific an actor as he once was, and his foray into directing seems to have been put on indefinite hold, Gibson has produced a remarkable body of work on both sides of the camera – full of films we want to watch again and again. And for that, he truly deserves his place as a fair dinkum Home Cinema Hero ●

A star is born:

Gibson shot to fame in the *Mad Max* and *Lethal Weapon* films in the 1980s



Quintessential Gibson...

Mel unleashes his crazy side in *Lethal Weapon*



1 Over the edge

Riggs shows his softer side as he tries to talk down a possible suicide from jumping off a building



2 Clunk click every trip

Only to give it up and handcuff himself to the jumper, saying 'Yeah, I'm a psycho. But I'm still a cop'



3 Taking the plunge

To show just how crazy he is, Riggs then jumps himself, taking the now reluctant civilian with him...



4 'He tried to kill me!'

Landing safely on a crash mat, Riggs tells his frantic partner, 'You wanted him down? He's down!'

Must own...



Lethal Weapon

Warner Home Video → R2 DVD
£14 Approx

Alongside Mad Max, *Lethal Weapon's* suicidal cop Martin Riggs remains Gibson's most iconic role. The first film is a fantastic slice of '80s action cinema that set the template that a million cop buddy movies would emulate.

55.14: A simple trip to question a hooker suddenly turns more explosive, ramping up the Dolby Digital 5.1 mix.

94.48: 'What do you say, Jack? Like a shot at the title?' Riggs and his nemesis (played by a suitably psychotic Gary Bussey) finally have it out in the finale.



Mad Max 2

Warner Home Video → All-region BD
£25 Approx

The original *Mad Max* made Gibson a star everywhere, except America. Its 1981 sequel changed all that, ramping up the post-apocalyptic spectacle.

04.19: The film starts as it means to go on with a super-charged car chase. What a shame the lossy Dolby Digital 5.1 audio sounds so thin and weedy.

77.30: It's time for the film's spectacular finale as Max heads up a convoy in a heavily-armed fuel tanker, with The Humungus and his army of freaks in hot pursuit.



Apocalypto

Icon Home Entertainment
Region B BD → £11 Approx

Possibly the pinnacle of Gibson's career as a director, this thrill-ride mixes together elements from *Last of the Mohicans* and *First Blood*, all presented in the obscure Yucatec dialect.

69.51: The AVC 1.85:1 1080p picture and uncompressed LPCM 5.1 audio are put through their paces as Jaguar Paw is marched to be sacrificed.

112.49: Reborn from the earth, Jaguar Paw finally starts to turn the tables on his pursuers with the aid of some particularly angry hornets.



Braveheart

20th Century Fox → All-region BD
£23 Approx

Not quite the masterpiece some claim it to be, Gibson certainly delivers on the entertainment stakes, telling the story (both as director and leading man) of Scottish hero William Wallace.

76.45: Mel's big speech leads in to a massive battle packed with plenty of directional audio courtesy of the superb DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix.

122.03: Flaming arrows, stampeding horses and yet another epic battle sequence that will push your system to the limits with its aggressive sonics.

Worth seeing...



Gallipoli

Paramount → R2 DVD
£16 Approx

Australia's greatest director Peter Weir helmed this extraordinary film. Gibson stars alongside Mark Lee as a pair of sprinters who join the Anzacs and are sent to fight the Turkish army in WWI.

62.58: 'This is supposed to be warfare'. Rare levity as Archy and Frank make the most of an unexpected reunion during manoeuvres.

99.08: Frank runs through the trenches with a message from General Gardner that could avoid a massacre in the film's haunting finale.



Payback

Warner Home Video → All-region BD
£16 Approx

Brutal and uncompromising (especially in the Director's Cut that also appears on this Blu-ray release), *Payback* finds Gibson in brilliant form as a bad guy left for dead and hungry for revenge.

52.59: Compare this tender interior scene between Mel and his love interest with the Director's Cut to see how much colour was removed from the image for the film's theatrical release.

87.25: When Mel's car is ambushed by a truck-load of gun-toting gangsters, the DD 5.1 mix goes into overdrive.



Signs

Walt Disney Home Entertainment
All-region BD → £16 Approx

The final twist is downright stupid, but there's still plenty to enjoy about this creepy alien invasion movie. Not least a fantastic central turn from Gibson as a former Reverend who lost his faith.

58.83: The fact that the aliens can travel through space but struggle to open doors might be pretty silly, but the pantry sequence cranks up the tension.

79.30: The disc's uncompressed LPCM 5.1 soundtrack isn't what you'd call bombastic, but subtle spatial effects deliver plenty of atmosphere.



What Women Want

Icon Home Entertainment
Region B BD → £11 Approx

If there's one chink in Gibson's armour, it's the rom-com. Stupid and insulting on pretty much every level, this laugh-free flick is Gibson's career nadir.

28.18: A bottle of wine, a hair-dryer, a pair of tights, a jar of bath beads and a tub full of water bring about a shocking experience for Gibson's character Nick.

61.28: Nick quickly discovers that being able to hear a woman's thoughts while having sex with her isn't always a pleasant experience.

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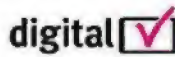
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INSTALLS

→ **Smarthome highlights** KALEIDESCAPE Server giant adds Blu-ray playback to its multiroom solutions CRESTRON Touchscreen controllers, HDMI switchers and more RUNCO New CI projector from the US brand BARN STORMER Take a tour of this CEDIA award-winning home cinema barn conversion AV-HOLIC! An HCC reader guides you through his home cinema setup



Cinema ahoy!

Like Marmite, you'll either love or hate this pirate-themed theatre, p36

Kaleidescape zones in on Blu-ray

New movie players spread hi-def to all corners of the household

US company Kaleidescape is looking to enhance its reputation as one of the kings of the movie servers with two new products that offer Blu-ray support along with improved architecture and a new user interface.

The £3,000 M500 player copies Blu-ray discs, DVDs, and CDs onto a Kaleidescape server. Imported content can then be played back by the M500, or its more affordable non-ripping M300 sister player, creating what the brand claims is the world's first multizone movie server for Blu-ray.

Interestingly, BD playback will only function if the original disc is in the player – a relief to movie studios worried about piracy. This would seem to limit the appeal of a BD server – hence Kaleidescape's pledge to release a multidisc loader. This will keep a large number of discs within its system, and offer bulk import functionality. The loader is expected to be available in the first half of 2011, but is as yet unnamed and unpriced.

'We have the tools'

Despite this somewhat awkward approach, Kaleidescape is in bullish mood: 'We have invested a great amount of time and resources in developing the M-Class architecture, which is our platform for future innovation,' says the company's CEO Michael Malcolm. 'We now have the tools to improve our world-renowned user experience and offer an even greater

variety of content.'

Kaleidescape's Movie Guide software currently covers around 135,000 films, including over 3,300 Blu-ray titles, allowing customers to browse their software collection via a full-colour, slick, cover art interface. The company has patents pending for video bookmarks allowing instant playback, easy access to scenes or songs, and control triggers for adjusting screen masking, lighting and curtains during playback.

Kaleidescape's players can deliver 1080p24 video, and pass Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master

Audio soundtracks as a bitstream to your AVR.

The high-end server giant is proud to number the queen of the bikini babes, model Heidi Klum amongst fans of its kit, but does believe interest in its BD servers/players will 'trickle down to broader consumers'. By that we assume it means ones with smaller wallets, not larger waistlines. www.kaleidescape.com

Two's company:

Kaleidescape's new M300 (top) and the M500 players support Blu-ray playback



Cables go 3D



Overhauling your system for a 3D world can include the cables too, hence

Jenving Technology's latest High Speed HDMI interconnect. The Supra HF100 retails for £60 a metre with an extra £7.50/m up to a maximum of 10m, and is designed to full 48bit colour depth and 1080p specifications. The Audio Return Channel is also supported.

The cables also have removable connectors that allow them to pass through small conduits, and are supplied with both straight and curved housings – the latter puts less stress on the cable and HDMI socket. www.jenving.com

Plug it up!



The self-proclaimed 'Ultimate UK mains plug' has found its ideal match from

Japanese accessory and cable specialist Furutech. The FP-1363 is the socket designed to complement the thrusting pins of Furutech's FI-1363 13-amp mains plug, and claims to improve transparency, detail, dynamic range and bandwidth. Pricing varies between £75-£135 depending on whether it's a single or double version, or gold or rhodium plated. The FP-1363 boasts a nylon/fibreglass body, copper conductors and aluminium front plate.

www.soundfoundations.co.uk

Stream dream



Transferring audio from your computer to your home cinema system without wires or magic can be done

with the £1,000 Airstream WM-10, a wireless DAC built by French brand Micromega. The WM-10 converts the digital signal from your PC/Mac before feeding it to an amp up to 100m away. Performance is fine-tuned using a low-bandwidth transformer and a low-noise, fast response regulator. Airstream works seamlessly with Apple's iTunes, Windows devices and music streaming sites. UK distribution is by Absolute Sounds.

www.micromega-hifi.com

Sesame street



Euroscreen's recessed projector screen, the Sesame, has been improved in this '2.0' guise. The

addition of removable end flanges means easier access during the installation phase, and a bottom bar design allows the screen to be shut flush to the ceiling – it's therefore ideal for stealth cinemas. The Sesame 2.0's white aluminium case is just 100mm high and 125mm deep. The screen available in 16:9 and 2.35:1 ratios (along with other, less cinematic guises) and in 1.00 and 0.93 gains. RF and IR control options are catered for.

www.draperinc.com

Media moguls



Elite's new Media stands are designed to be the perfect partner to a new flatscreen without bumping up your overall expenditure too much. The Media stands come in two sizes, one catering for 26-32in screens (£170), and the larger for 37-42in models (£200). The stands are made from high-density MDF and have three black toughened glass shelves – the 12mm top shelf can hold up to 40kg. The side panels are finished in either black or walnut veneers and have an outside recess for storing your movie collections. www.elite-accessories.co.uk

New style of light



High-end home cinema projector specialist Runco has introduced a £4,500 model – the LightStyle LS-3. Offering 1080p resolution, the DLP LS-3 incorporates a trio of the company's own digital technologies (SuperOnyx, ConstantContrast and ViViX) to help deliver a claimed contrast over 10,000:1. It also offers an Imaging Science Foundation (ISF) suite, 16:9 images up to 120in, and twin HDMI connectivity alongside component video, RS-232 and 12V trigger jacks. www.runco.com

Sherbourn to run



US company Sherbourn is shipping a new pre/pro processor to the UK, with optional rack mounting available for those wishing to install it in an AV bootroom. The PT-7020A comes fairly loaded with features, including twin Cirrus 32bit dual core DSPs, automatic Cirrus/Sherbourn multichannel room correction and automatic loudspeaker setup. Decoding support is offered for the growing family of Dolby Digital and DTS formats. All legacy video inputs can be scaled and output over HDMI at up to 1080p. www.sherbourn.com

Belgian buns



It doesn't matter how good your home cinema is if you plonk your buns down on the kitchen stool for viewing – step forward the Rembrandt range of authentic cinema-style seats from Belgium-based Home Cinema Modules. Available for approx £2,000 for a double unit, the Rembrandt features a high-quality wood frame and ergonomic design. Those after a more living-room feel should investigate HCM's Roma II luxury seats, available in beige, black or red leather, with prices starting around £1,800. www.armourhe.co.uk

Life at the touch of a button

Crestron unveils a range of devices to simplify your electronic existence

Custom install stalwart Crestron had much to say for itself at the recent CEDIA Home Technology Event in London's ExCel centre. Foremost among its launches was a non-locking version of its TPS-6X, dubbed the TPS-6XNL.

This 6in wireless touchpanel will ship soon. When docked and recharging the TPS-6XNL is a wired Cresnet or Ethernet connected panel with full-motion video. Off the dock, it automatically switches to a wireless RF device. The RF radio remains connected in both modes and operates within the IEEE 802.15.4 range, rather than that operated by Wi-Fi. It sleeps when not in use and wakes up immediately with no more than a touch on the screen or buttons.

'What makes the TPS-6XNL different is there is no latching hardware, making it very simple to dock and undock,' explained Crestron MD Robin van Meeuwen.

The TPS-6XNL has high-speed two-way RF contact up to around 65m and one-way infrared connection for controlling individual consumer components. The Ethernet connection enables full-motion video in a scalable or full-size window. Button text is backlit and it ships with both a pre-engraved backlit button bezel and a blank bezel, illuminated pushbuttons, and backlit text. Available finishes are black or white.

Show time

Crestron also used the CEDIA Home Technology Event to showcase its other products, including its Digital Media (DM) system and new Prodigy range.

DM is Crestron's product range of AV switchers/extenders for the digital age, capable of handling HDMI, VGA, DVI, Display Port and Ethernet signals (among others). The DM-MD8X8, an eight-in, eight-out matrix which retails for £10,500 approx,

was on display to demonstrate its ability to effortlessly deliver hi-def feeds over long distances via inexpensive Cat5 cable. Not the most visually stunning event at the Home Technology event, but still impressive.

The Prodigy range is aimed at those who want the full Crestron home automation lifestyle at a more affordable price. Music, movies, thermostats and security systems can all be controlled 'from any room in your house or any place on the planet' – a bold claim that will appeal to control freaks everywhere. What's more, Crestron reckons it can build a program for your AV and lighting system within an hour. In the words of the company's PR manager Petra van Meeuwen: 'This simple and affordable solution gives our dealers the opportunity to provide home control for every lifestyle and budget.' System prices begin at around £3,500.

www.crestron.co.uk

Range finder: The TPS-6XNL (left) was part of a wide selection of control options shown by Crestron at the Home Technology Event



Quiet please!



Installers FAB won accolades for this barn-storming cinema that majors on acoustic treatment. **Gareth Mason** reports



Kit Checklist

Genelec: 3 x HT315 active speakers; 6 x IW25 active speakers; 2 x HTS4B active subwoofers
ADA: Suite 7.1 audio controller
Dolby: Lake Audio Equalizer
Digital Imaging: Titan 720P DLP projector
ISCO: Iscoscope 3S anamorphic lens; motorised lens sled
Custom projector and lens mount
Screen Excellence: 120in wide 2.35:1 acoustically transparent side masking projection screen
Kaleidescape: Movie player 2; IU server
Sky: HD receiver
Microsoft: Xbox Elite Games console
Nintendo: Wii Games console
Creston: CP2E control processor; TPMC-8X plus external battery pack
Helvar: Digidim lighting control system
RPG: Acoustic treatment package
Middle Atlantic: 29U equipment rack and custom shelves

An empty barn in Suffolk is not the obvious candidate for a home cinema, but if you've got one to spare the scope is considerable. Converting it was the task for UK installer FAB AV and one it approached with relish.

While an empty barn is something of a blank canvas, the job did come with one major caveat. A groundkeeper's cottage lies next to it, and in the words of the owner: 'Good groundkeepers are hard to find – so whatever we build mustn't disturb him.'

Shhhhhh!

Ensuring silence beyond the cinema room required several steps. Firstly, the basic box structure was designed with a double stud wall, made of two layers of 15mm plasterboard sandwiching a layer of Green Glue on a 100 x 50mm wood frame, filled with acoustic fibreglass. The ceiling received a similar treatment.

Other noise-limiting techniques included housing the projector, in a mechanically ventilated box at the rear of the room behind a glass panel, fitting in-line silencers to the air conditioning, and spec'ing double acoustic doors to form an airlock style entrance.

Foam was used all around the room to fill spaces to act as bass traps, while internal walls were treated with acoustic absorbers and diffusers to a depth of 100mm. Dark red and black stretched acoustic velour cloth was used on the walls for visual effect.

All this groundwork means the owner can really crank up the sound without fear. The room is designed for 7.1 surround, with two subs and three active Genelec models located behind a 120in 2.35:1 Screen Excellence acoustically transparent screen, and six more Genelecs spread about the side and rear walls. The fully calibrated system can run a Reference Sound Level of 103dB – or 106dB if the owner presses a 'turbo' preset on the Creston controller.

The owner is over the moon with the finished room, saying: 'I still don't understand to this day how they convinced my wife to spend so much – but we're both grateful they did! The result is breathtaking. The room looks fabulous and sounds incredible; yet when you stand just outside the building, you can't hear a thing – even when it's running full blast!'

CEDIA agreed, giving this stunning cinema a gong in its 2010 awards. ➤

34 INSTALLS



A The source

A Digital Imaging Titan 720p DLP projector is responsible for this starry light. At the other end of the room is a 120in 2.35:1 Screen Excellence screen

B Mr Speaker

While the front speakers are hidden away behind a false wall, four Genelec AIW25 active speakers line the side walls, with two more placed at the rear

C Room for nine

The seating array means nine people can soak up the HD visuals and Reference Level audio – but we'd definitely try to bag one of these chairs at the front

D Well stacked

AV devices tucked away out of sight in the Middle Atlantic kit racks include a Kaleidescape Movie player, Sky+HD receiver, along with Xbox and Wii consoles

E Calling card

With this FAB personalised floormat, the owner won't forget who to call when he wants to upgrade

F Stay in touch

A Crestron CP2E processor and TPMC-8X touchscreen are the nerve centre of this cinema

G Padded cell

Genelec's HT315 active speakers are fitted snugly in-wall



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Jim Hill has his AV timbers shivered over in the subcontinent



Cinema ahoy!

We looked a little further afield for one of this month's install features and found a custom-made cinema. Dr Himanshu Kumar is the genius behind this themed cinema, and the pro-installation company HK Mini Theatres based in New Delhi. The *Pirates of the Caribbean* theme is just one of Dr Kumar's bespoke never-to-be-repeated creations.

Dr Kumar has dreamed up a range of themed cinemas for his clients from, the flight deck of *Apollo III* to the palatial interior of an Egyptian tomb. All of them hide a state-of-the-art home cinema system. This one was specced for one of the

subcontinent's leading industrialists, who wanted a room that would conjure up all the ambience and excitement of a great film and, of course, dazzle his friends.

Special K challenge

Dr K's job was to turn one of the buildings in his client's tranquil farm near Delhi into a home theatre of the highest order – a rather daunting task when faced with a 25ft by 40ft bungalow as your canvas. The good news was that cost would not be an issue.

Before specifying any of the electronics, the team went to work turning Dr Kumar's whimsical

piratical drawings into definite plans. Creating the lowered ceiling and raised floor was tricky, but necessary for a 14-seater cinema that concealed all of the wiring.

For seafaring paraphernalia, like the barrels, ship's wheel and rigging, Dr K's team plundered the flea markets of New Delhi. This didn't include the skulls and femurs, thankfully, which were cast in fibreglass. The burned oil applied to the guide ropes to age them gives you an idea of the attention to detail.

With another very satisfied customer, it's back to the drawing board for Dr Kumar to think up the next phantasmagorical setting ●

Take a seat:

The steps guarantee a good view from all the seats. They're covered with a blue carpet designed to resemble waves



Room essentials

A Down with the ceiling!

Lowering the ceiling and raising the floor of the bungalow wasn't easy but was necessary to hide all the wiring for the speakers and lighting

B Lower the topscreen!

A 12ft Draper projection screen provides the canvas on which to paint those glorious hi-def pictures for up to 14 guests

C Fire up the projector!

The projector, almost anonymous behind the cutlass wielding fan, is a Vivitek LED DLP model

D Oh sit down!

The chairs have motorised reclining mechanisms by US brand Berkline, with real leather upholstery and cup holders in the arms

E Audio broadside

Two subwoofers and the three frontstage speakers are hidden behind the screen, leaving only the surrounds on show

F In the line of fire

The cannons aren't just for show they break up reflections on the walls and improve the acoustics

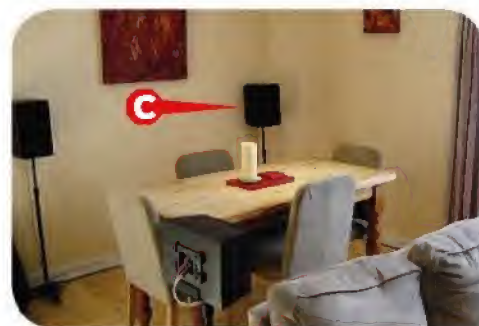
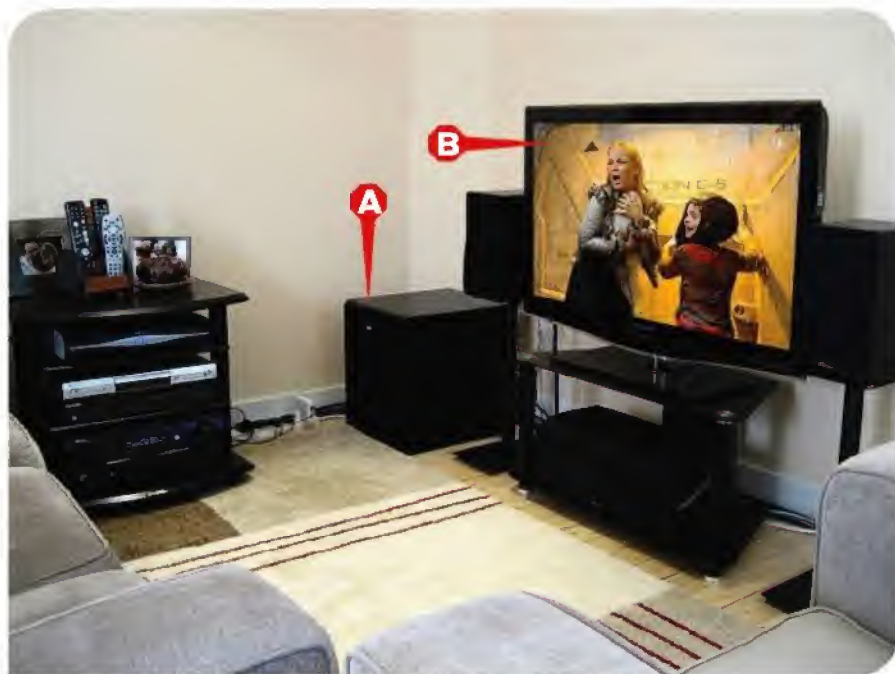


→ Kit Checklist

Vivitek: H9080FD LED DLP projector
 Draper: Matte white 12ft 16:9 projection screen
 Klipsch: THX Ultra speakers (7.1 system)
 Marantz: UD9004 Blu-ray player
 Marantz: AV8003 pre amplifier
 Marantz: MM8003 multichannel power amplifier
 DVICO: TVIX HD7000MA PVR
 Thecus: N5200 NAS with 10TB storage capacity
 Crestron: Touchscreen automation

Certified: AV-holic!

Every issue, an **HCC reader** invites you to take a tour of their beloved home cinema setup...



Ready for more: AV-holic Neil is hopeful 3D can make his hobby even more exciting

Introduce yourself...

Neil Hamilton, aged 31. I'm the Assistant Director of Music at Strathallan School in Scotland.

And you're an AV-holic?

Yep. I've been an AV addict for about 12 or 13 years now. It started by spending my student loans at uni on AV kit. My first purchase back then was a Denon Dolby Digital 5.1 amp.

What's in your setup?

Sources include a Samsung BD-P1500 Blu-ray player, Pioneer DV-575A DVD player (for DVD-A, SACD and my old Region 1 DVDs) and Sky HD. The screen is a Samsung LE40B650. A Denon receiver powers a 7.1 system, using Mirage FRx cabinets and an M&K V-75 subwoofer. I also use Apple Airport Express to stream music wirelessly from my 24in iMac.

So what was your last kit purchase?

The Denon AVR-1909 – and I could not be happier. The new HD audio formats just rock the place. With any luck, the next bit

of kit I might buy would be new front channel speakers, but trying to find a dealer that sells Mirage in the UK isn't easy!

How much have you spent on your AV habit over the years?

I would say that I have spent around £6,000 on AV gear over the years. I don't really consider it that much money compared to what I could have spent. The kind of sound you can get for that much money is incredible.

What's your current fave disc?

My favourite BD, for demo purposes, would have to be 2012. L.A. falling into the sea just sounds and looks fantastic! I have *Avatar* and *Saving Private Ryan* waiting for me now though, so things may change!

Are you excited about 3D?

Not sure about 3D yet. I'll have to wait and see what the home applications of the technology look like before I make a final decision, but I am always happy to support new tech if it makes my home cinema viewing even that more exciting ☺

Room essentials

A Bass bin

Low-end duties are handled by this M&K subwoofer, which packs a 12in driver

B Liquid crystal diva

Samsung's LE40B650 is a solid hi-def performer, and a perfect aesthetic match for Neil's black-clad speakers

C Rear admirals

A pair of Mirage FRx standmount cabinets complete this system's 7.1 array

D Definitely maybe

Hi-def images come courtesy of this BD-P1500 Blu-ray deck

E Call in the receivers

Denon's AVR-1909 receiver was marketed as an affordable powerhouse and it certainly does the job – our Tech Labs measured 112W with five channels driven from this £500 component

Join the club

Do you want to see your home cinema system featured in the pages of *Home Cinema Choice*? If so, log on to www.homecinemachoice.com/avholic where you'll find all the information you need.



A new generation of Yamaha AV Receivers: Hear the bigger picture

From a company that consistently achieves 5-star ratings and rave reviews for its AV Receivers and, indeed, Hi-Fi equipment, you'd expect their latest home cinema range to tick a lot of boxes. And you'd be right.

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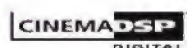
In short, it's exactly what you'd expect from a state-of-the-art, quality AV Receiver made by a world-leading manufacturer.

But there's one feature you'd never dare expect in such a highly specified unit. And that's the price. The brand new Yamaha RX-V367 costs just £200 or less. Popcorn anyone?

Discover more at uk.yamaha.com



* HDMI 1.4 3D feature will be available via firmware update



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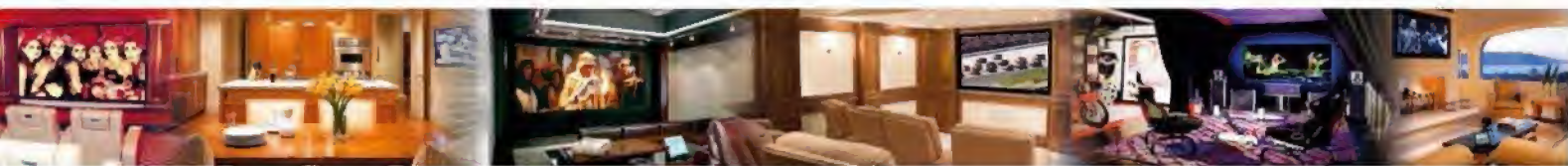
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REVIEWS

→ **Hardware highlights** SONY LED TV with brand-new stand design
 KRELL £20,000 pre/power combo ONKYO World's first 3D-ready AVR SIM2 Super high-end three-chip DLP projector ACOUSTIC ENERGY Bookshelf 5.1 system LG 47in Infinia LED TV & soundbar/subwoofer solution GROUPTEST Big-name budget Blu-ray players AND MUCH MORE!

Silver machine

Modestly sized and priced, Monitor Audio's Silver RX6 AV12 redraws the 5.1 system boundaries with its superb specification. See p54



HCC Ratings key

Outstanding	1 2 3 4 5
Above average	1 2 3 4 5
Acceptable	1 2 3 4 5
Disappointing	1 2 3 4 5
Dire	1 2 3 4 5

HCC DOESN'T BELIEVE IN OVER-PRAISING HARDWARE. CONSEQUENTLY, A THREE-STAR RATING SHOULDN'T BE CONSIDERED A BAD RESULT – IT SIMPLY MEANS THAT A PRODUCT PERFORMS ACCORDING TO ITS CATEGORY POSITION. A FIVE-STAR RATING IS ONLY AWARDED IN EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES



The monolith design fulfils the brief of looking good on or off



The Lean Machine

Like one of Kubrick's apemen, **Jim Hill** is in awe of Sony's leaning monolith – but could it be too stylish?



The next wave of Bravia TVs is upon us, bringing with it Sony's much-touted monolithic design. Naming conventions have been torn up just as we were getting used to them, so it's now a case of choosing from the EX (essential), HX (home cinema) or LX (lifestyle) ranges, or the NX (networked) series, like this impressive 40in example.

Part of Sony's monolithic mission statement is that 'a television should look incredible even when you're not watching it'. With the continuous glass face of the TV fitting flush at the edges, the 40NX803 does look like a featureless slab of darkness. When you turn it on, the illuminated logo and standby light make themselves known, and if you run your hand behind the frame on the right, master controls illuminate too. Overall, this slim and minimal panel is a huge improvement on last year's clumsy plastic frames.

Stand delivers

The optional brushed aluminium table stand adds an extra twist. A screw adjustment allows the TV to lean back by up to six degrees; the idea is that this restores the proper eye-line when the TV is positioned on a low furniture unit, which, according to Sony, is becoming a more popular option in European households.

Edge-mounted LEDs illuminate the LCD panel, allowing its narrow depth and giving the picture a brightness and contrast boost.

AV/CV

Product:
40in Bravia
from network
(NX) series

Position:
Creating a niche
with its unique
monolithic slab
design

Peers:
None yet
outside of Sony

Combined with the powerful Bravia 3 Engine and the crisp 1080i resolution of its own Freeview HD channels, this is an impressive-looking set.

It's also heaving with features. **Connectivity stands out, with Wi-Fi built in**, and DLNA compliance for streaming from a PC. There are direct USB and PC inputs too, but downloadable web content makes it interesting.

AppliCast was Sony's first stab at putting bite-size web content on your TV. Consisting of a handful of pointless widgets that took an age to open, it's still around, but is joined by Bravia Internet Video, which makes all kinds of material available. With wireless online access to IPTV channels like SingingFool and YouTube offering clips and music videos, or LoveFilm for HD video trailers and renting whole films, there's always something to watch. A lot of the content is very compressed and, to be honest, rubbish, but there's good stuff in there, too.

The revelation is how you can access channels via the XMB graphic interface, the crossbar borrowed from the PS3. You zip along the horizontal access to choose analogue or digital TV, movies, music, or other sources and servers, and vertically to select the item.

It's by far the fastest and best interface of any TV I've seen and suffers from just one flaw. Although it looks just like the PS3 interface and >

→ Specifications

HD Ready: YES up to 1080p24
3D Ready: NO

Digital TV tuner: YES Freeview HD

HDMI: YES 4 x HDMI v1.3

Component: YES 1 input

PC input: YES 1 x 15-pin D-Sub

Sound: 2 x 10W

Resolution: 1,920 x 1,080

Brightness (claimed): N/A

Contrast ratio (claimed): N/A

Dimensions (w/o stand) mm: 994(w) x
635(h) x 64(d)mm

Weight: 20.1kg

Features: Wi-Fi connectivity; Bravia
Internet Video and Widgets;
Motionflow 200Hz processing;
Bravia Engine 3; optional brushed
aluminium stand



Laid back: Sony's new TV stand can angle the screen backwards by up to six degrees

moves almost as fast, the Bravia version is presented in mushy standard-definition, so it fails to impress quite as much as it should.

The superb remote deserves a mention. It's a typically clear and intuitive backlit Sony design, but with a nicely textured finish and concave front. Flip it over and there's a single on/off switch.

On the TV itself, the connections are logically assembled, with two HDMI ports at the side and a headphone jack. Note that the USB port, as is usually the case with Sony products, can only read from flash drives rather than from external hard discs, and it struggles with formats like MP4 files.

Picture perfect

The 40NX803's picture quality lives up to the TV's slick design and flashy interface. Our test card coaxed a pin sharp image, with a wide colour gamut and dark blacks. The reds look rather tame after calibration, but it's actually a very natural and well-balanced colour palette.

Moving 1080p24 images from a matching Sony Blu-ray player provide a steady and seamless image with no blocking, or judder during wide camera pans. The Bravia link function kicks in to optimise the settings

between the two Sony products and uses DeepColour over the HDMI connection to maintain the colour accuracy. The polished production and glossy imagery of the latest *Star Trek* film are a good way to show off the vivid picture performance of this LCD panel.

Thanks to the bright LED backlight, the picture is vibrant even in direct sunlight, but remember that this is lit by edge-mounted LEDs, so it doesn't have the local dimming capability of Sony's premium LED TVs. This becomes apparent when a pale object appears in shot and the entire screen goes from black to grey to illuminate it.

The TV channels are presented particularly well, too. Both the analogue and digital stations line up on Sony's XrossMediaBar, complete with the name of the show that's currently playing. There is, of course, a proper EPG as well, showing the whole week's scheduling.

Although the analogue channels are unwatchable using my TV aerial, the 576i Freeview channels appear to be sharp enough. That's thanks to the Bravia 3 Engine processor, which upscales them accurately to fit the native 1,920 x 1,080 screen. Scroll all the way up to the three Freeview HD channels and you get yourself an appreciative bump in the clarity, depth and consistency from the 1080i broadcasts.

Master of none

Sony's S-Master speakers have pumped out a decent amount of sound in the past, but they seem a bit thin and reedy here. Depending on the input, which seems to vary quite widely, you might find yourself turning the volume all the way up to ten and you can expect a little distortion at that end of the scale. Cleverly, when you slot the set into the optional aluminium table stand, the speakers, which are mounted at the bottom of the panel, are able to drive sound through the perforations in the plinth.

Sony's NX series certainly looks like it's a tempting proposition. The design is fabulous and the user interface and remote control are both a dream to use. The picture quality is among the best of the edge LED-illuminated models that are available and key boxes, like the Freeview HD tuner, are all ticked. It's really just the feeble speakers, and foibles like the soft-focus onscreen graphics that prevent this set from getting the full set of stars ●

→ Tech Labs

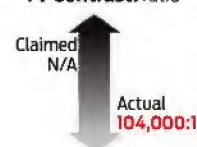
Power consumption: Watts



White screen: Power consumption in standard mode with power saving mode switched to off

Test Footage: Movie playback at full volume draws around 300W

TV Contrast: ratio



Picture: In the default Standard mode (with 'light sensor' on) the NX803 measures a very impressive 104,000:1. Switch to Vivid mode and it jumps to 189,000:1. These are excellent figures

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets: A choice of four presets, the best of which ('Warm 2') is close to the 6,500K 'white point'. However, a full range of adjustments are available for manual tweaking
Cool: 10,700K
Normal: 9,600K
Warm 1: 8,300K
Warm 2: 6,800K



HCC VERDICT

Sony KDL-40NX803
£1,600 Approx

Highs: Smart design; superb remote and user interface; deep blacks and crisp colours; useful online content
Lows: Bravia widgets are glitchy and slow; soft focus GUI; puny speakers

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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→ Specifications

Processor S-1200U

Dolby Digital TrueHD: YES and Dolby Digital Plus

DTS-HD Master Audio: YES

THX: NO surprisingly

Multichannel input: YES 7.1 channel RCA

Multichannel pre-out: YES 7.1 RCA and 7.1 balanced XLR

Multiroom: NO although twin phono video/audio output

AV inputs: YES 4x composite, 4 x S-video, 4 optical inputs, 4 coaxial digital

HDMI input/output: YES 4-in, 1-out, v1.3

Video upscaling: YES to 1080p (with optional module)

Component input/output: YES 3-in, 1-out

Dimensions: 438(w) x 144(h) x 435(d)mm

Weight: 8.2kg

Features: RS232 control; 4x 12V trigger outputs; multiple surround enhancement modes; twin dual core 32bit Cirrus CS497004 DSPs; 24bit ESS Sabre DACs

S-1500 power amp

Power: 7 x 150W

Inputs: 7 x analogue phono; 7 balanced XLR

Dimensions: 439(w) x 145(h) x 503(d)mm

Weight: 25.3kg

United states of amplification

It plays by its own rules and sets its own prices. **Richard Stevenson** wonders what might have been if he'd followed Krell's philosophy

Scar Wilde would have bought Krell amplification. In fact, any man whose mantra is 'I have the simplest tastes, I am always satisfied with the best' would do well to peruse the Krell catalogue for some high-end retail therapy. I do, as a voyeur, of course, contemplating the aural merits of an Evolution 707 processor (£33,000) and seven Evolution 900 power amps (£140,000). Or, I could pay off the mortgage... Hmm choices, choices.

Krell is a brand that either needs no introduction, or lots. To those familiar with the US marque, they will respect the 30-year heritage at the high-end of audio engineering – particularly amplifiers. They will appreciate the superb build, the immaculate attention to detail and revel in the prestige of owning the brand. To those who have not heard of Krell Industries, they may feel that £20K for the S-1200U processor and S-1500 power amp is a little rich. They might also think that anyone even contemplating spending that sort of money on an amp has a tenuous grip on reality.

You see, Krell is the Rolls Royce of the global audio industry. Like the flying lady herself, Krell simply doesn't play specification trumps with the competition. It's not pushing the boundaries of absolute power, it's not festooned with features and it won't go round corners as fast as a Lotus Elise. Krell does its own thing in its own way and is responsible for a long and prestigious line of exquisite-



50 REVIEWS

sounding audiophile products stretching over three decades. It is a hi-fi brand that has status, kudos and a pride of ownership second to probably no other on the planet.

What we have here is Krell's entry into the top-end of the 'realistic' AV amplifier market, a little before the price tags move into cost-no-object territory. The S-1200 is a fully-featured AV processor coming in at just over £10,000 in basic form and £13,000 as tested here with its 'U' suffix. This denotes the inclusion of the video upscaler grafted from the Evolution 707, offering full 1080p output and 48bit colour depth with any video input. The processor is mated to the S-1500 power amplifier, as tested here in seven-channel guise at a smidge under £7,500.

Arthouse AV

The S-1200U is gorgeous. It works as a piece of art, its smooth lines and contrasting aluminium textures complementing the bonkers-mad volume knob with a fine sense of the surreal. The build and finish is among the best of any amplifier to grace my listening room in 20 years of reviewing. The buttons have a firm weight, the indicator LED lights are just the right intensity and the display offers the largest and easiest-to-read text characters of any AV processor on the market.

Krell's heavyweight volume knob runs on slick bearings, meaning that a solid glancing blow will run it on for 10 or more turns. I was surprised that the knob isn't motorised so doesn't spin with volume input from the remote. While this would have been even more engineering eye-candy, perhaps Krell felt the resulting gyroscopic forces might have been a problem for your equipment rack.

Around the back is a unique selection of socketry that looks a little dated in comparison to the latest Japanese high-end receivers. **Just four HDMI inputs and a solitary HDMI output doesn't impress me much,** doubly so as they are only v1.3 spec rather than v1.4 – although Krell assures us that the HDMI videoboard is easily changed and designed with future upgrades in mind. There is a positive cornucopia of analogue connections, though, including composite video, component video and even S-video sockets, totalling 11 analogue video inputs. Nestled below these are no fewer than 10 analogue stereo audio inputs, which should cater for the most ardent audiophile.

Fully-balanced XLR connections are provided as the output of choice to the S-1500, and there are enough 12V triggers and data ports to keep any system integrator happy.

Under the neatly-milled aluminium hood, the S-1200U is a little different from most processors and AVRs. Rather than use standard op-amps and integrated circuits, every channel runs on a discrete Class A circuit that Krell claims offers the greatest signal purity and the highest bandwidth. The DSP engine is at the leading edge of the field (also grafted from the Evolution 707), based on a pair of 32bit Cirrus chipsets that feed very sexy 24bit ESS Sabre DACs. For those wishing to give the S-1200U a clean analogue audio signal and soak up some of the Krell audiophile magic, a 'preamp' mode bypasses all digital circuitry and routes analogue stereo to a balanced resistor ladder volume controller.

The remote control is yet another object of engineered beauty, assuming your aesthetic penchant airs on the side of chunky, solid and bullet-proof. Feeling as if hewn from a raw block of aluminium and filled with granite, it weighs a bit in the hand. The buttons are small but click with the sort of clunk that would have a gaggle of car designers nodding appreciatively. It's also probably the only remote to grace my house that the dog took one look at and decided not to bother trying to chew.

Solid casework

The S-1500 is housed in a similar sized and immaculately finished case, weighing in at three times the mass of the S-1200U. Behind the smooth, clean and slightly menacing fascia, the S-1500 can be specified in five, six or, as here, seven channels of 150W – all fully balanced. This is where Krell soars, with a huge linear power supply, massive arrays of quick-charging capacitors and high-current surface mount technology throughout. In each channel module, Class A circuitry is employed for the input stage with solid Class A/B through the power stage. Krell is also the only manufacturer I have come across that quotes its products' maximum heat output – the S-1500 offering 1900 BTU/hr room heating as a sideline activity to first-class home cinema amplification. Green it isn't.

Connectivity to the S-1500 is XLR by choice, with phono plugs provided in case you don't have a balanced-out pre-amp/processor. The binding

posts certainly make for easy connection with spades or bare wire speaker cable, but the inputs and outputs are not all directly one above the other. This is a right royal pain if you are leaning over the beast from the front to connect it up and may cause an initial connectivity mix up if you're doing the install yourself.

Connecting up

Of course, if one purchases a Rolls Royce, one would have 'a man' to drive it for you and he would probably be called the James the Chauffeur. If one purchases a Krell, one would have 'a man' to set it up for you, and he would probably be called John the Installer. Which probably goes some way to explain why the S-1200U has a block text onscreen interface, the

AV/CV

Product:
Serious AV
processor and
seven-channel
power amp

Position:
Just below
Krell's über
high-end
Evolution series

Peers:
Anthem
Statement D2/
P2/P5;
Lexicon
MC12HD/ZX-7



look and feel of which went out of date with Betamax.

Compared to the current crop of even budget receivers, like Onkyo's TX-SR608 (see page 68), the Krell's onscreen menus are a far cry from fancy full-colour GUI's and picture-led setup screens. The menus are a simple cascade system and are relatively straightforward where basic set-up and operation is concerned, but I do miss the onscreen explanations of what each menu feature or function does. So when you are deep within the S-1200U's menus and are confronted with choosing what SHAPE you want your PKING filter to be, one has to refer the manual. As this is on CD rather than paper, that in itself requires you to boot up a PC to get the answer. Sigh.

There is no auto setup routine at all and the EQ system is even less user-friendly in that it assumes John has some RTA (Real Time Analyser) software on his laptop and a calibrated mic. From his measured in-room response results, he can configure a range of filter types (notch, low pass, high pass and several shelf filters) each across three individual frequency points. There are four EQ memories, so he can save, for example, best setup for action movies, best setup for chick flicks, best setup for multichannel music, and perhaps best setup for 'posh cocktail party with Burt Bacharach background music'.

Yeah, okay, the ethos of products like the S-1200U is, of course, based on the customer service a retailer

or installer brings to the party, and there is a very useful pop-up that overlays the key input signal info whenever you change modes or volume. So why would you want to go back into the menus once it is set up anyway? It is certainly not to engage any niche features, because the S-1200U simply doesn't have any...

Think I'm joking? I'm not. Krell's combi system has no truck with networking functionality, USB inputs, compressed audio enhancers or picture fine-tuning adjustments, not to mention Audyssey DSX, THX post-processing or Dolby Pro-Logic IIz. But if it can sound like a chorus of angels with standard off-disc HD-audio formats and CDs anyway, do we care? Er, no. ➤



Connections

A Legacy cornucopia

While I can't believe anyone forking out £20K for an AV pre/power amp won't be using high-end sources with HDMI outputs, Krell includes a cornucopia of composite, component and the nearly extinct S-video connections, too

B HDMI shortage

The 4-in, 1-out collection of v1.3 spec HDMI connections is a little frugal by current standards, as high-end systems often feature a projector (for movies) and a TV screen (for TV) in the same room

C Trigger-tastic

The S-1200U offers a complete array of 12V triggers, with the flexibility to fire up the power amp, turn on your projector, drop down a motorised screen and close the curtains at the touch of a button...

D XLR credentials

Balanced stereo input, fed from a high-end two-channel disc spinner, is a nod to Krell's heritage in high-end stereo amps and shows the S-1200U's audiophile credentials

E Audio extravaganza

Like the balanced XLR inputs, the plethora of two-channel phono stereo inputs is a real audiophile bonus – although damned if I can think of 10 stereo sources

F All in the balance

Seven discrete XLR inputs allows fully-balanced hum-free connection, while the seven phono inputs are included for those with unbalanced processors... or not enough cash left to buy XLR cables

G Staggered bananas

The binding posts offer 4mm banana sockets and are staggered for easier connection with chunky spade terminals. Outputs not placed below the relevant input could cause connection mayhem, though



Bearable:
Though not motorised, the volume knob runs smoothly on its bearings

Liquid honey

Krell's audio prowess is something to behold. The S-1200U/S-1500 combination sounds huge, immersive, richly detailed, full-bodied and smoother than a panther wearing a smoking jacket. There is none of the tizzy fireworks and in-yer-face energy of the current crop of big AV receivers, making even the best of those sound rather harsh and feisty by comparison. This is a sound to be savoured, to fall into and stay there until the film credits are rolling, the popcorn is finished and the wine glass contains nothing but a dried red ring in the bottom.

With every film there is a real presence to the audio – something you feel and experience at a subliminal level rather than simply an audible one. **It envelops you and drags you into the movie with its hypnotic charms** rather than projecting the sound at you. And this in itself makes it a difficult review. I put on *The Matrix* (Blu-ray) as the usual opener to get a feel of this machine's credentials and made the grand total of three lines of notes before getting engrossed in the film. Suddenly two hours had slipped by.

Even with highly processed and artificial soundtracks, such as the remastered version of *Minority Report* (Blu-ray), the Krells elicit a naturalness that goes about as far as an amplifier can in assisting the film's suspension of disbelief. Having spent the last two decades listening for the depth of the bass, the spatial scale of rear effects, the projection of the dialogue etc, the Krells simply refuse to be pigeon-holed with any other AV amplifier. The bass does not attempt to turn your spleen to jelly (like Denon), high-frequency effects do not have an almost Q-Sound-like three dimensional space (like

Pioneer), and the dialogue doesn't leap out of the mix to make the actors sound like they are standing beside you (like Anthem). But as a cohesive whole, the Krell sound is so very right.

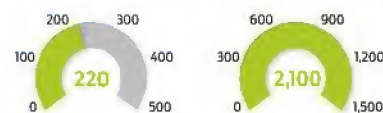
The battle scenes in *LOTR: Return of the King* (Blu-ray) are utterly believable, placing you in the thick of the action and the emotion. With the Oliphants charging across the plains, arrows howling through the air and orc armies meeting the Riders of Rohan, the Krells show the utmost respect for this cinematic masterpiece. It is simply massive, potent and convincing, with no one part of the sound drawing overt attention to the actual production. Likewise, dialogue benefits from the lucid and natural balance, seemingly flowing into the room. There is admirable accuracy in the placement of each character's voice, but not so that it becomes an effect in itself.

More impressive still is how this naturalness translates with music, both multichannel and stereo. Krell's heritage in the audiophile amplifier market shines out from the first disc, blending its silky smooth and even hand with detail resolution like no other AV amplifier. Again, there are no artificial fireworks, no overtly excessive bass punch and no ear-searing top-end extension. What remains is the music, tantalisingly real and infectiously emotive. From the audio-definitive *Legends of Jazz* Blu-ray, *Take Five* by Al Jarreau and Kurt Elling oozes from the speakers like warm honey on a Summer's day, luring you in with its vocal articulation and musical sweetness. The Krells offer amazing timing and ensure that any rhythm-based tune will get your feet tapping and head bobbing in seconds.

Looking at upscaled video from a DVD you can't help but admire the clarity and edge definition created from the original SD signal – but do the results justify the £3K cost option of the 'U' suffix? Well, not for me, but if you watch a lot of DVDs and off-air SD TV perhaps it makes more sense. Then again, does £20K for an AV amplifier make much sense to most people anyway, even if the kudos of ownership is right up there with products bearing the silver Spirit of Ecstasy? Probably not, but hook the S1200U and S-1500 to a decent speaker system, feed it a diet of Hollywood's HD finest, and the cost seems an irrelevance in a world of utterly immersive movie and music entertainment ●

→ Tech Labs

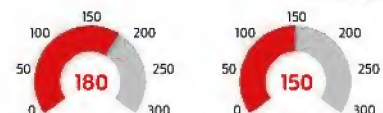
Power consumption: Watts
S-1500/S1200U



Idling: This duo is pretty power hungry when idling

Powered: Seven channels driven requires over 2KW

Power ratings: Watts (8Ω, 0.5% THD)
S-1500

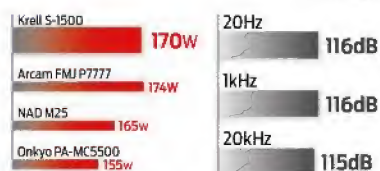


2-channel 8Ω: The S-1500 gives an impressive power rating in stereo mode

7-channel 8Ω: Our power measurement for 7-channel performance is bang on Krell's spec

Untainted: Watts

Signal/noise: dB
S-1500



Fidelity firewall: 170W with 0.05% THD (two channels into 8Ω) means distortion-free performance up to serious volumes

S/N tests: Excellent ratings at all frequency bands from Krell's killer combo



HCC VERDICT

Krell S-1500/S-1200U
£13,00/£7,500 Approx

Highs: Incredible rich detailed and natural sound; oozes quality; easy to use

Lows: Low on additional features; same price as a new car – a German-built family saloon at that

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



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Though relatively modest in size, these cabinets are heavyweights in terms of scale and specs



(Almost) as good as gold

Monitor Audio's Silver Series contains precious parts from higher up the range, reckons **Danny Philips**

Esteemed sound-monger Monitor Audio last graced the pages of *HCC* with the Radius HD system, a classy sub-sat package that brings the company's prowess to an affordable price. But those with bigger living rooms and bigger budgets might be tempted by the latest package from the company's midrange Silver series, the RX6 AV12.

The good news is that the Silver RX series is equipped with tech from the monolithic Platinum and Gold speakers, and builds on the very capable Silver RS series.

The package consists of a pair of RX6s floorstanders up front with the RX-Centre nestled in between, plus a pair of RX-FXs (£400) taking care of rear-channel duties. It's anchored by the RX-W-12 subwoofer, which contributes 500W of muscle. Another package, the £1,800 RX1 AV12, substitutes the RX6s for the bookshelf RX1s.

Designated drivers

Build quality is exquisite. Elegant to the eye but tough and robust within – think Vinnie Jones trapped in Darcey Bussell's body. Key to the design are the slim cabinets, made possible by the compact C-CAM drivers that form the heart of each speaker, as well as the sumptuous high-gloss black finish. A choice of four real wood veneers offers a classy alternative. The clumsy base plinths are the only aesthetic mis-step.

The RX6s might be stumper than many floorstanders at just 850mm high, but they're deceptively heavy – you get the sense that there's tons of technology inside just bursting to make itself heard.

AV/CV

Product: Midrange speaker package with living room-friendly cabinets

Positioning: One of two packages in the Silver series, which sits below the Platinum and Gold GS ranges but above Bronze BR

Peers: Klipsch Icon 5.1; Mission 79 Series; KEF Q Series

And indeed there is. Key to the Silver RX range is Monitor Audio's Ceramic-Coated Aluminium Magnesium (C-CAM) metal alloy driver cones, which offer delicacy and dynamism in equally, while Rigid Surface Technology (RST) aims to reduce cone break-up and improve midrange clarity.

Also inside is a new wider-bandwidth, 25mm C-CAM gold dome tweeter pushing high frequency reproduction to over 35kHz, crucial for squeezing out the extra detail in Blu-ray and SACD/DVD-Audio discs. It teams up with the 6in C-CAM bass and bass/mid drivers to form a two-and-a-half way system.

Critical dialogue duties fall on the shoulders of the RX-Centre, which uses the same driver line-up as the RX6s to ensure tonal matching across the front.

Usefully, **the RX-FX rears can be configured as bi-pole or di-pole speakers**

depending on where they're placed and whether you like your effects direct or diffuse – make your choice using the switch on the back. They're designed to be mounted flush on the wall, and doing so garners the best results. Sound radiates along the walls to create a seamlessly enveloping rear soundstage.

As with the rest of the system, the RXW-12 sample has the same super-sexy gloss black finish and weighs a ton, despite its compact size. Inside the sealed 25mm MDF enclosure, a 500W Class D amplifier drives a newly designed 12in C-CAM cone, equipped with a two-magnet motor system and 3in voice coil.

A small bank of controls is placed on top, and includes a volume dial and buttons for toggling between



Base design: Apart from the plinths, the RX6s are a triumph of style to complement the substance

two EQ presets. The default EQ 1 setting provides the best overall performance, particularly for music playback, but EQ 2 should be selected when you require a bit of extra bass kick for movies, injecting an extra 4dB at 21Hz.

On the back panel is a dial for selecting the crossover (between 40-120Hz), which should be set to 40-60Hz to integrate with the rest of this system. But if your AV receiver governs the LFE output, then the Low Pass Filter switch can be used to bypass crossover control. Also on the rear is a switch to flip the phase 180°, left/right phono line-level inputs and outputs for daisy chaining other subs.

End may be nigh

To test the Monitor Audio's mettle I loaded up *2012* on Blu-ray – and its reproduction of the DTS-HD MA soundtrack was gobsmacking. Driven by an Onkyo TX-NR906 and Oppo BDP-31 Blu-ray deck, the RX6s and rears deliver an open and immersive listening experience. This movie demands suspension of disbelief, but that's not hard when sonics are presented with such purpose and

conviction – it might just make you think the world is ending.

Each speaker simply spoils you with detail. I could make out the subtlest sounds in every scene, from the faint creaking and rustling of falling debris as the Sistine Chapel caves in, to the gentle background chatter inside important-looking command centres. **If the devil is in the detail, then this system is Satan himself.**

So it aces the intricate stuff then, but the system also has real clout when called for, thanks mainly to the RXW-12 sub. The rumble of advancing tidal waves is deep and weighty, while the massive lumps of burning rock that rain down in Chapter 7 hit the ground with taut, focused blasts of bass. When earthquakes crack the ground open, the impact is appropriately seismic.

Activating the EQ 2 mode injects added punch into the low-end effects but I found the standard EQ 1 meaty enough. But the RXW-12 is about much more than roof-shaking bangs and booms. It adds subtle depth to gentle background murmuring and infuses gushing film scores with heart-melting warmth. It's the glue that holds it all together.

The relaying of the movie's pseudo-scientific claptrap is carried out with emphatic clarity by the centre speaker. Speech is clean and sibilance-free, and easily deals with the unfolding apocalypse.

But no matter how raucous the action is, the system stays firmly in control, even at rock concert volumes. High frequencies never sound harsh or bright, midrange is full of body and the sub doesn't know the meaning of the word flabby. Timing's tighter than a team of synchronised swimmers and the interplay between channels is bewitching. I'm sold.

But this brilliance is by no means confined to movies. It also relishes the challenge of a decent SACD like Roxy Music's *Avalon*, bringing its spacey, atmospheric sounds to life with spine-tingling results. I followed this up with demo-room favourite *They Can't Take That Away From Me* by Jane Monheit and John Pizzarelli and the purity of Monheit's voice sends shivers down the spine.

All this makes the Silver RX series a formidable proposition. Granted, it can't match the microscopic insight and neutrality of Monitor Audio's pricier systems, but its boundless energy and sheer listenability makes it hard to beat in its price class ●

→ Specifications

Silver RX6

Drive units: 1 x 6in RST bass driver; 1 x 6in bass/mid driver; 1 x 1in C-CAM gold dome tweeter
Enclosure: Dual-chamber, bass reflex with HiVe II port technology
Frequency response: 38Hz-35kHz
Sensitivity: 90dB
Power handling: 125W
Dimensions: 185(w) x 850(h) x 250(d)mm
Weight: 16.4kg

Silver RX Centre

Drive units: 1 x 6in RST bass driver; 1 x 6in bass/mid driver; 1 x 1in C-CAM gold dome tweeter
Enclosure: Sealed cabinet
Frequency response: 45Hz-35kHz
Sensitivity: 90dB
Power handling: 125W
Dimensions: 500(w) x 185(h) x 200(d)mm
Weight: 9.62kg

Silver RX-FX

Drive units: 1 x 6in RST bass/mid driver; 2 x 1in C-CAM gold dome tweeters
Enclosure: Sealed cabinet
Frequency response: 60Hz-35kHz
Sensitivity: 89dB
Power handling: 80W
Dimensions: 120(w) x 300(h) x 250(d)mm
Weight: 4.69kg

Silver RXW-12 subwoofer

Drive units: 1 x 12in C-CAM driver with triple suspension & 3in long throw voice coil
Enclosure: Sealed cabinet of 25mm MDF with internal bracing
Frequency response: 40-120Hz; lower limit 27Hz (EQ1), 21Hz (EQ2)
On board power: 500W RMS from Class D digital amplifier
Dimensions: 340(w) x 340(h) x 410(d)mm
Weight: 22.56kg
Connections: Phono stereo input and link output; 12V DC trigger



HCC VERDICT

Monitor Audio Silver RX6 AV12
 £2,200 Approx

Highs: Dynamic, engaging sound with pin-sharp detail and healthy doses of taut, powerful bass;

Low: Ugly base plinths

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



KRELLS ANGELS

THE EVOLUTION CHAPTER

Since launching the legendary **KSA-50** amplifier a quarter of a century ago, **Krell** have established themselves as the absolute world leaders in the design of high end audio electronics, rocking the establishment over the years with novel technologies that have redefined the way we listen to music.

In 2005, chief designer Dan D'Agostino took the audio community by storm with the introduction of the stunning eight-chassis **Evolution One** and **Evolution Two** amplification systems, a creation that represented his ultimate strike of genius on the high end, and received accolades all over the world.

What's more, it doesn't stop there: this year sees the launch of a complete new range of **Krell Evolution** pre- and power amplifiers - plus two exciting source components and an extraordinary unique integrated amplifier.

Out go the sharp heatsinks, in comes the most beautiful casework ever seen, housing technology that delivers totally lifelike music, with nothing added and nothing taken away. Included in the line-up are the **Evolution 505** CD/SACD player, the **Evolution 525** audio-video source, the Evolution 202 two-chassis preamplifier with the **Evolution 222** single case version, the **Evolution 402** stereo amplifier plus the incredibly powerful **Evolution 600** and **900** monoblocs.

For the home theatre, there is the powerful **Evolution 403** three-channel amplifier and the **Evolution 707** processor, a reference model that is without equal, and demonstrates Krell's passion for unparalleled performance and innovation.

Attracting huge interest and praise is the unique **FBI** Fully Balanced Integrated amplifier. Aimed at those who desire the superb performance of the long-established Class 'A' Krell **FPB** series in a single chassis, this is the true master of all integrated amplifiers.

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John Archer puts his new car plans on hold

AV/CV

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HD projector

Position:
Entry-level in
the SIM2 C3X
Lumis lineup

Peers:
Projectiondesign
Aviolo Optix;
Runco
VX-2000D



There aren't many corners of the AV world where a price tag of £19,000 might be considered 'cheap'. But one such place is the high-end front projection market, occupied by such rarified brands as Runco, Projectiondesign, and SIM2.

So it is that we find ourselves genuinely surprised to find SIM2 coming out of left-field to offer a new model in its C3X Lumis DLP series for a price south of £20,000. After all, the previous most affordable model, the core C3X Lumis, costs nearly £26K. So with the C3X Lumis Uno, you could save seven grand and blow it on a nifty runaround for the missus

instead. Or the holiday of a lifetime to the Maldives Hilton.

Alternatively, hopes SIM2, by breaking the key 20 grand barrier, the C3X Lumis Uno might tempt a few more people who may have balked at the £26,000 asking price of the main C3X Lumis. Plus, bringing in a much cheaper C3X Lumis gives custom installers more flexibility when trying to hit the budgets they've been given by their client.

All of which only really matters, of course, if the C3X Lumis Uno is actually any good. So let's start by finding out just how SIM2 has been able to shave £7,000 off

the price of the main C3X Lumis model to get here.

At first glance, the list of 'cutbacks' looks impressively short. For all that's really substantively different is that the C3X Lumis Uno lacks the dynamic and manual iris adjustments of its costlier sibling.

However, when you stop to think about this a little more, this is potentially quite a severe downgrade for such an illustrious projector series.

For starters, not having the dynamic iris function puts a big dampener on the C3X Lumis Uno's contrast ratio claims. For while the original C3X Lumis promises a huge (for DLP technology) 35,000:1 contrast ratio, the Uno claims 'just' 9,000:1. Ouch.

Inflexible friend

Arguably more important, though, given the vagaries of contrast ratio measurements, is the relative lack of flexibility for installers created by the removal of manual iris adjustment. Being able to physically alter the amount of light emitted through the projector's lens gives installers all kinds of extra options when it comes to, say, picking a matching screen, or working out how to control light scatter. Plus, on a more basic level, it provides an installer with a potentially key extra component in fine-tuning the projector's pictures.

Whatever doubts I might have about how the lack of iris adjustments might damage the Uno's appeal to its target market, one thing not in doubt is that the Uno is a feast for the eyes. It sports the same stunningly curvaceous shape, surprisingly compact footprint and gorgeously high-gloss finish as the main C3X Lumis – a projector which, for me, is **the single prettiest model in the front projection world right now**.

It's still got oodles of high-end tech under its hood, too, despite the missing iris adjustments. At its heart, for instance, are three DarkChip 4 DLP chipsets, driven by a 260W lamp able to pump out an extreme 2600 ANSI Lumens of brightness. That's only 400 short of the output quoted for the main C3X Lumis.

What's more, the Uno can have its colours tuned to within a millimetre of their lives courtesy of the incredibly sophisticated PC-based 'LiveColour' colour calibration software we raved about in our earlier review of SIM2's Grand Cinema C3X 1080.

Also potentially very significant is that you can adjust the output of the >



→ Specifications

3D Ready: no This is serious cinema gear
HD Ready: yes up to 1080p24
Resolution: 1,920 x 1,080
Component video: yes one input
HDMI: yes 2 x v1.3 HDMI inputs
PC input: yes one D-Sub
12V trigger: yes three
Brightness (claimed): 2,600 ANSI Lumens;
Contrast ratio (claimed): 9,000:1
Dimensions:
 450(w) x 200(h)
 x 480(d)mm
Weight: 11kg
Features: Colour calibration via LiveColour PC software; three-chip DLP system; ALPHAPATH technology; die-cast optic system, three lens options available; RS-232 jack; USB control jack; fan noise 32dB; lamp-life 2,500

Silver fox:
 The sumptuous curves help the Uno disguise its sizable frame



Rear admiral:

The twin HDMI and trio of 12V triggers make this PJ install-friendly

lamp to a series of different wattages. This feature is also found on the core C3X Lumis, but it's great that it's been retained for the Uno, since it means installers do after all have some degree of flexibility with the amount of light being 'cannoned' out of the Uno's lens.

Other key points that help make the Uno every inch a premium projector include 10bit video processing, its use of a new, patented Die-Cast compact light engine using SIM2's own ALPHAPATH technology, and the fact that you can have it with any of three different lens options: the short throw 1.37-1.66:1 T1, the 1.82-2.48:1 T2, and the 2.6-3.9:1 T3.

Where the Uno really makes its price count, though, is where it matters most: its performance.

Strike one!

The first thing that strikes you as you watch it is how intensely bright its pictures are. They explode off my reference screen – even using the lowest lamp output setting – with the sort of dynamism and intensity you just don't get with 'mainstream' PJs. This leaves me in no doubt whatsoever that the Uno is capable of driving much larger screens than my 100in effort, and in larger rooms.

The extreme brightness of the image has other knock-on benefits too. Not least is the exceptional dynamism of the projector's colour response, which finds colours looking both sumptuously vibrant but also exceptionally natural. In fact, the insight the Uno gives you into subtle blends and tonal shades is almost shocking when considered alongside even a very respectable mainstream (£3K or so) projector.

I'd expected the Uno to lose something compared with SIM2's top-end projectors with shadow detail due to its iris limitations. But while this does happen, the amount of subtle greyscale and colour information the Uno manages to retrieve during dark sequences is still prodigious, and adds further to that sense of insight I mentioned earlier.

As does the projector's pixel-perfect fine detail presentation, which is so accurate that it reveals absolutely without mercy the good and bad things about any high-definition film or game.

The fact that it can pick out a few image problems lesser projectors can't isn't the Uno's fault, of course. I merely point it out to stress how much more crisp and accurate its pictures are than you see with normal, 'value' projectors.

For anyone who's never seen a premium projector in action, the experience of **watching the Uno can be akin to seeing your favourite Blu-rays again for the very first time.**

Let's not forget, either, that the Uno's three-chip DLP technology means it doesn't suffer like cheap, single-chip DLP projectors with the 'rainbow effect', or motion noise.

Perhaps inevitably for such a powerful yet compact projector, the Uno runs a little more noisily than we'd like. Otherwise, the only real question I can raise about the Uno is a philosophical one. If you can afford £19K for a projector as good as this, can't you afford an extra £7K for the even more flexible and talented C3X Lumis? But as noted earlier, £7,000 can go a long way for anyone... ●

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen: This is the default '230W' setting; switch the lamp to full brightness '260W' and it rises to 350W

Test footage: No measured increase in power use of our test footage – this is expected, as there is no dynamic iris

TV Contrast: Ratio



Picture: Our figure is higher than SIM2's own claim, and very respectable. Luminance is 17.5fL. Full brightness setting increases luminance to 20fL, and contrast to 70,000:1

Colour accuracy



Presets: There are no 'presets' (at least in the conventional sense) here. However, you do get complete control over just about every aspect of the picture – all memorised on a 'per input' basis. What's good is that we measured a 6,500K temp out of the box ('native' colour management, EN5 gamma correction, lamp power '230W')



HCC VERDICT

SIM2 C3X Lumis Uno
£19,000 Approx

Highs: Truly premium picture quality; exceptional colour management; gorgeously designed

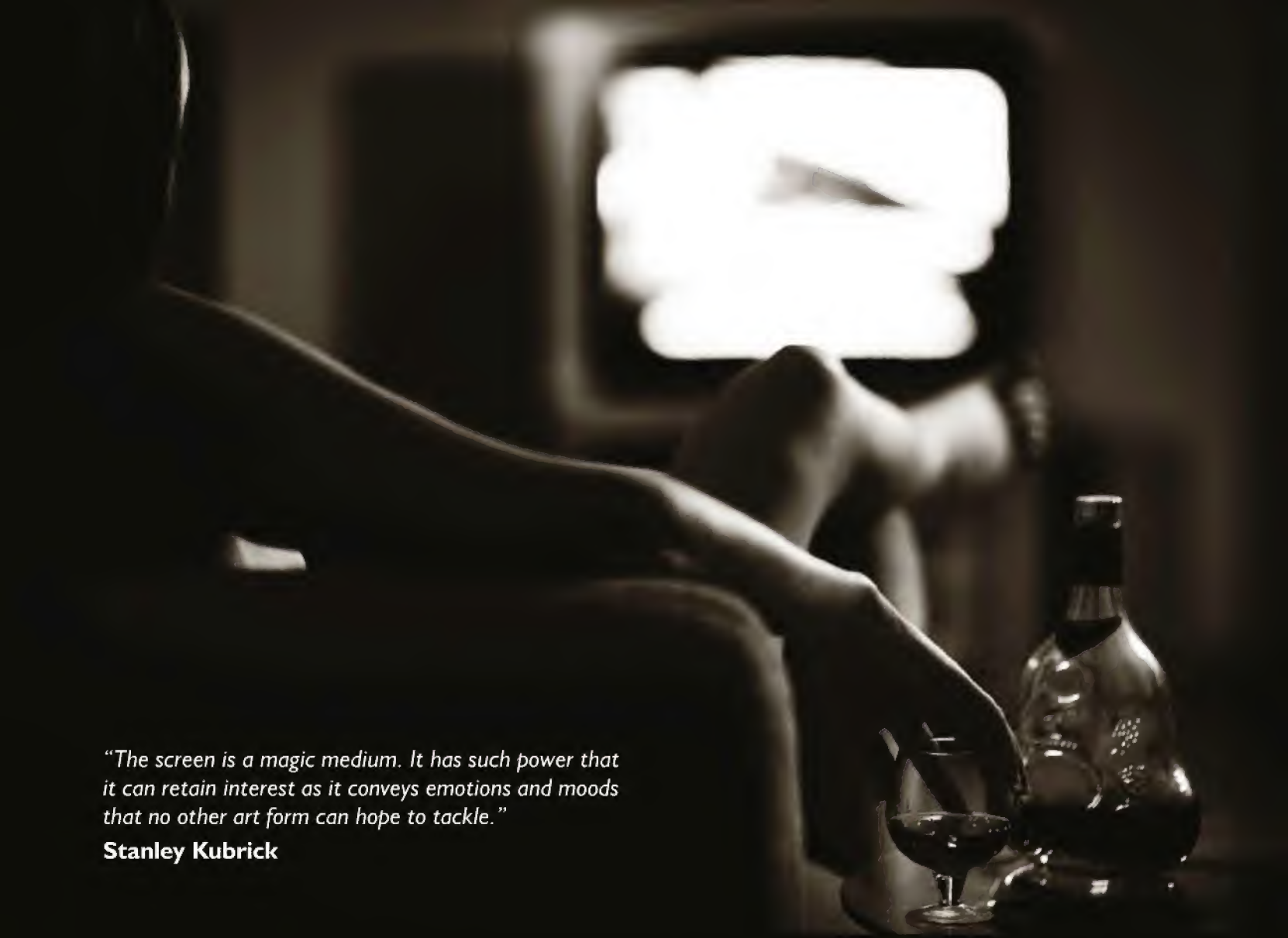
Lows: Lacks any dynamic or manual iris controls and so loses out a touch on shadow detail to higher-level Lumis models; runs a little noisily

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



"The screen is a magic medium. It has such power that it can retain interest as it conveys emotions and moods that no other art form can hope to tackle."

Stanley Kubrick

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Hi-def TV for all

Virgin Media's V Box HD offers premium HD and Video On Demand without a monthly surcharge. **Steve May** gorges on its goodies

The monthly price of multichannel hi-def TV has been slashed with the introduction of Virgin Media's latest set-top box. The first in what promises to be a new range of receivers and PVRs, the HDD-less V Box HD, made by Cisco, allows subscribers to the cablenet to get on-tap HD without a monthly surcharge (à la Sky). Virgin Media customers just need make a one-off, £49 payment (plus £35 installation charge) to get hold of one.

Unboxed, the unit is a little larger than first imagined, and sports a distinctive curved chassis. Once up and running, there's a similarly oversized blue LED display dominating its fascia. This allows it to function as an oversized clock. Seven forward facing buttons offer full navigation even without the

rather routinely styled remote handset. One curiously features a 'heart' graphic which illuminates to confirm your box is connected to the Virgin TV network.

Rear connections include HDMI, optical digital audio, Smart card slot, F-Connector and legacy Scart. There's also an inactive Ethernet port and e-SATA connector.

Up and running

Once viewing card and receiver have been paired and authorised, you're up and running. The user interface is no different from that seen on the company's V+ PVR: a simple, but effective, grid-based guide with Mini TV windows running top right. This iteration of the trademark GUI is very fast and responsive to navigate. Image quality via the HDMI output is excellent (source dependant,

AV/CV

Product: Hi-def receiver with integrated VOD

Position: The V Box HD is one of three receiver solutions from Virgin Media. It's flanked by the SD V box and the V+ HD PVR

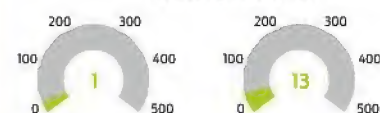
Peers: Sky+HD PVR; BT Vision+

naturally). Virgin Media's current HD channel selection comprises: BBC HD, ITV 1 HD, Living HD, 4 HD, E4 HD, FX HD, Syfy HD, Discovery HD, National Geographic HD, MTV HD, Eurosport HD and ESPN HD. Coming soon are BBC 1 HD and Film4 HD, plus a number of Sky's HD channels (including sports and movies) following a recent deal between the two rivals – although additional subs costs will almost certainly apply for the premium Sky content.

Alongside this healthy selection of linear HD TV is by far the best VOD choice in the UK TV market. Drill into the menus and you'll find more than just Catch-up TV variants (although these are also comprehensive and can be searched by either channel or day). Genre-specific strands support special (and general) interests, such

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Standby: The standby power measurement is less than 1W

In use: A fairly low figure, and less than the HDD-toting rivals

→ Specifications

HDD/PVR: No You'll need to step up to the V+HD unit for timeshifting

DVB tuner: No Single cable HD tuner

HDMI: Yes

Component output: No

Phono output: No

Digital audio output: Yes Optical

Dimensions: 351(w) x 265(d) x 73(h)mm

Weight: 4.1kg

Also featuring: Seven-day EPG; Extensive SD and HD catchup services; TV Choice VOD selection; dormant USB and Ethernet ports; programmable remote control



as Sci-fi and fantasy, Sport, Comedy, Documentaries and more. Elsewhere branded offerings like Warner TV and HBO allow (at least partial) season runs of big shows to be revisited; there's also a reasonable selection of music clip packages – plus adult-themed material for those that fancy it. Apparently, the TV On Demand library now offers over 4,600 hours of telly, so it's unlikely you'll ever run out of stuff to watch.

Unique platform

It's worth noting that Virgin Media's implementation of the BBC iPlayer is that unlike any other living room platform. Uniquely you can catch-up selected shows in HD as well as SD.

The quality of streamed HD is astoundingly good. With so much Pull content available it's rather easy to get over the lack of any hard drive recording capability.

Such content richness also elevates the V Box HD away from the likes of Freeview HD set-top boxes and prompts the question: when so much telly is available On Demand, do you really need a hard drive at all? For casual (but considered) viewers, the answer is probably not.

Equally, the V Box HD makes for a brilliant second source in a multiroom TV installation. If you want to feed off Virgin Media's TV smorgasbord in a secondary den or bedroom it's an ideal solution. And, of course, no HDD means zero noise.

Boxing clever:

The V Box HD gives cablenet subscribers the opportunity to receive on-tap HD without a monthly surcharge

It's unclear at present just how the V Box HD will sit within the upcoming Virgin TiVo landscape. The characteristic TiVo user interface is radically different from what's on offer here, although the hardware itself would seem to be a perfect fit for the linear TV/IPTV mash-up of services planned. It's possible that a firmware upgrade could be used to bring to V Box HD in line, although the difference may be so jarring for users that the cablenet could be reluctant to go in that direction. Wait and see.

Virgin Media offers a variety of TV packages, which vary in cost depending on the services taken (TV, broadband, phone line). If you opt to take just its TV package, prices start at £11.50 and rise to £29 per month. TV service costs falls dramatically though when you bundle it with a phone and broadband package. It's best to check the Virgin Media website for deals, as money

Familiar face:

The user interface is the same as the company's PVR

can often be saved on installation



HCC VERDICT

Virgin Media V Box HD £49 Approx, plus subs/installation

Highs: HD channel selection with no supplemental fee; fast, responsive EPG; Video On Demand choice

Lows: Large retro LED display

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

3D: No HD Ready: YES Full HD resolution Tuner: YES Freeview HD
Component video: YES One set HDMI: YES 4 HDMI sockets (2 side, 2 rear)
PC input: YES VGA Resolution: 1,920 x 1,080 Sound: 2 x 10W
Brightness (claimed): N/A Contrast ratio (claimed): 9million:1
Dimensions: 1,123(w) x 707(h) x 34.5(d)mm Weight: 27kg
Features: 200Hz motion processing; Ethernet and integrated Wi-Fi; NetCast
web content including Picasa and YouTube; Intelligent Sensor to dim the
backlight when appropriate and save energy; USB 2.0 port; ISF certified;
THX certified



LG's 47LE8900 sports the brand's style-conscious Infinia design



To Infinia and beyond

LG's biggest Full LED panel gets the Infinia treatment. **Jim Hill** ticks off the premium features



The launch of this year's Infinia TVs sees LG pushing the design and specifications of its premium sets to a whole new level, and with its seamless, flush-fitting screens and outrageous nine-million-to-one contrast ratio claims, the Korean company's TV division looks set to carry on chewing up market share. Or perhaps it's simply the fact that LG finally has its own made-up word to take on the Bravias and Vieras of the world.

The Infinia sub-brand is used to describe the upper-end TVs across LG's LCD, LED and plasma technologies and they're all linked by the seamless screen design. There's no separate bezel, just a single sheet of plastic. A bit like Sharp's Quattron and Sony's Monolith, then.

This 47in set is part of the 8 Series that fits in just below the flagship 9 Series, but it still boasts a full LED backlight, NetCast widgets and THX specification.

Full LED trumps the edge-LED variety by illuminating the screen directly from behind and dimming the screen where appropriate. In fact, there are 240 separate blocks of LEDs placed behind the screen, which allows the panel to be particularly accurate with implementing its local dimming. It's not as slim as the edge LED sets, but the backlight has somehow been sandwiched into a very narrow panel of less than 3.5cm.

Like Sony's monolithic design, the Infinia's couldn't be any more

AV/CV

Product:
47in Full LED-lit
LCD TV with
flush-fitting
screen

Positioning:
Below the 9
Series Infinia
TVs in LG's
stable

Peers:
Samsung
UE47C8000

minimal, with the touch sensitive control panel only illuminating from within the bezel when you turn it on or touch it.

The border around the visible part of the screen is much wider than the showpiece LE9500, but it's still a handsome looking TV. And now that LG has added NetCast, its own version of Yahoo widgets, it is catching up on features, too. That said, the only apps available so far are AcuWeather, YouTube and Picasa, and they're not the fastest widgets to load and play on screen either.

Content in the stream

The same Ethernet port and NetCast feature also allows you to stream content from your computer via a router thanks to its DLNA compliance. It's not 100 per cent reliable, though, and a more direct way to get at your photos, music and downloaded movie files is to simply plug a flash memory drive, or external hard drive, into one of the two USB ports. This will display all your digital files on the big screen, making it easy to select what you're after.

Before I get to the picture quality, it's worth mentioning another of this set's major strengths – its responsiveness and ease of use. TVs that are weighed down with features are often complicated and sluggish when it comes to flitting between inputs or channels, but this set is super-fast. The remote isn't going to >



Sideshow: You wouldn't think they squeezed 240 blocks of LEDs behind the screen

win any design awards, but it is easy to use, so scrolling through the clear onscreen menu is a refreshingly simple task.

Within the menu, you'll find lots of other goodies. There's an eco mode that uses a sensor in the front panel to dim the backlight in dark conditions and optimise contrast. There are, in fact, nine preset picture modes to choose from including pre-calibrated THX settings for both daylight and evening viewing. **If you prefer to tinker, there's actually a surprising level of calibration tools available** to you, and the chance to enlist an expert to program two of the ISF-labeled presets.

For most people, the Picture Wizard offers the most immediate way to set up. It displays a series of test cards up on the screen, which you can easily set using your own judgment to get some great-looking results.

The LED backlight gives the picture a bright, colourful and highly contrasted image that has instant appeal. It also means you get clean whites, deep blacks and an impressive greyscale in between.

Like most super-sized Full HD LED panels, it's quite ruthless with poorly compressed Freeview channels, so the standard-definition channels look very soft and blocky, but switch over to one of the three HD channels, ITV HD for instance, and the 1080i signal looks suitably clean and sharp.

There's still a little grainy video noise apparent in the background, but not enough to spoil the show.

Stepping up to a proper 1080p signal at 24 frames per second, courtesy of a Cambridge Audio 650BD Blu-ray player, brings even better results. Manufacturers' quoted contrast ratios can often be misleading to say the least, but sensational 9,000,000:1 figure aside, the contrast here is superb – our Tech Labs recorded a startling 315,000:1 contrast ratio.

Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* on Blu-ray has some challenging dark scenes that can really test the resolution. Skip to the bare-knuckle fight in the seedy pub and most TVs will struggle to show the backs of the crowd as anything other than an amorphous, dark blob, but this set does well to resolve the body shapes in the gloom. The impressive greyscale and contrast levels are also very effective at picking out the grime in the grim London slammer.

The local dimming palette comes into play in these murky scenes by highlighting just the light faces and torches in the corridors as opposed to the whole screen as most backlights would. Add to this a neutral and realistic colour palette and you have a very filmic picture quality overall.

As for video processing, TruMotion seems more trouble than it's worth. The refresh rate seems to have no trouble keeping up with the action, whereas when you switch TruMotion up to its high setting, you'll see some horrible distortion around any fast moving objects. Better to leave it off.

Speakers go AWOL

LG's 'invisible speakers' are a bit disappointing too and sadly live up to their name a bit too much. They offer reasonable fidelity at lower levels and can sound quite musical, but the bass tends to thin out as the volume increases and it lacks the projection to justify an image of this size. LG suggests adding a soundbar to boost the audio. But to be honest, a screen this good really deserves a full home cinema system to back it up.

The crisp high contrast 47in LCD panel and full LED backlight are a winning combo that's produced the best picture quality we've seen on an LG LCD TV. Presumably the 9 Series will push this even further and, of course, this is where you'll find the 3D module and Skype capability too, but for now, the slick Infinia styling makes this a very attractive proposition.

Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen: It drops down to 65W with energy saving on maximum or 75W in energy saving auto in a lit room

Test footage: This was in standard mode with energy saving off. Sound quality is fair; an upward tweak of treble improves clarity

TV Contrast: Ratio



Picture: This was the default with energy saving mode off and local dimming on. With local dimming off it drops to 870:1

Colour accuracy



Presets: As with other LG flatpanels, white balance can be adjusted continuously between 'cold' and 'warm'



HCC VERDICT

LG 47LE8900
£2,000 Approx

Highs: Smart fascia; responsive and intuitive interface; LED backlight improves colours and contrast; great calibration tools

Lows: Feeble speakers; very limited web content

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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One of a kind

Onkyo is first past the post with a 3D-capable receiver for the masses. Budget rivals beware, says **Richard Stevenson**



→ Specifications

Dolby Digital TrueHD: YES and Dolby Pro-Logic 11x

DTS-HD Master Audio: YES and DTS ES 6.1 Discrete

THX: YES THX Select2 Plus

Multichannel audio: YES 7 x 160W

Multichannel input: NO this is digital all the way

Multiroom: YES main plus second zone

AV inputs: YES 5 x phono, S-video

HDMI input/output: YES 6-in, 1-out (v1.4a)

Video upscaling: YES to 1080p Component: YES 2-in, 1-out

Dimensions: 435(w) x 176(h) x 329(d)mm Weight: 11.5kg

Features: Audyssey DSX height or width processing;

overlay GUI; bi-amp front channel configuration; PC

VGA/RGB input via 15-pin D-Sub; two parallel sub

outputs; FM/AM tuner; RHD system control; Jitter-

Cleaning circuit; Music Optimizer for compressed

audio; Onkyo universal port (iPod/DAB); Audyssey

2EQ RoomEQ; mic-assisted setup



It's one of the world's first 3D-capable AV receivers, it's THX- Select2 Plus spec, and it offers Dolby Pro-Logic IIz height channel processing – super. But the biggest, sassiest feature of Onkyo's TX-SR608 is not the spec sheet eye-candy or its position at the cutting edge of home cinema, it's the price – just £450. See all the other Japanese manufacturers weeping over their budgets as Onkyo sets the price bar for entry-level 3D capable receivers very, very low

– in fact, even its £250 TX-SR308 is 3D-capable.

The SR608's key feature, the one it has genuinely launched (just) before anyone else, is HDMI v1.4a connectivity. This allows 3D pass-through from a suitable 3D source to a suitable 3D display device, meaning any receiver with v1.4a HDMI connectivity can simply 'switch' 3D signals. This feature has also been leveraged to pass-through HDMI audio and video from source to the TV when the receiver is in

Inner beauty:

Like many of Onkyo's products, the talents lie beneath the somewhat boxy surface

standby, very handy for late-night viewing. Likewise, the v1.4a spec offers an HDMI Audio Return Channel, meaning this receiver can amplify the sound from your off-air TV-viewing without any other hook up. All those quality HDMI features are topped with quantity, too – a class-leading six inputs, one usefully positioned on the front fascia for easy access.

Magnificent seven

Behind the headline features, the SR608 packs in a lot of nice-to-haves as well. There is an all-new seven-channel power amplifier, claiming a rather skewed 160W a-piece by quoting the figures into a 6 Ω load with a 1kHz signal with only one channel driven. That is like a car manufacturer quoting a vehicle's 0–60mph performance going down a steep hill with the wind behind it. See over the page for our Tech Labs own measurements.

Onkyo uses a three-stage inverted Darlington circuit configuration amplifier, offering very low negative feedback operation (so likely to be more natural sounding) with the disadvantage of a lot of ancillary control circuitry involved to keep the system in check. It's certainly not a low-heat design, but the TX-SR608 packs in an ultra-quiet fan.

The rest of the features form an affordable receiver hot-list,

including 1080p upscaling from Faroudja, Burr-Brown DACs to buff up the audio and twin parallel sub outputs, which is still 7.1, not 7.2 as Onkyo claims. Okay, there is no USB input capability, but adding to the DPL IIz channel mix this receiver also sports Audyssey DSX height and width channel processing.

With only seven powered output channels there are choices to make – front height or width or rear-back speakers? Purists would suggest that rear-back is the way to go as there is a fair bit of content out there with 7.1 encoding. Conversely, one might argue that expanding the vertical soundstage with height channels offers a lot more wow factor for most 5.1 encoded movies. Ditto width. Personally, I don't have enough genuine 7.1 channel recordings to worry about – and the added cinematic scale with height channels is frankly stunning compared to any linear array.

The good news is that you can chop and change easily to see which >



AV/CV

Product:
3D-capable
THX Select2
receiver

Positioning:
At the lower
end of Onkyo's
AV receivers

Peers:
In a class of
one until
models from
Denon, Pioneer,
Sony and
Yamaha arrive

70 REVIEWS

you prefer before getting the drill and Rawlplugs out.

Powered up, the TX-SR608's graphic user interface is very slick and intuitive. There is super-fast access to any feature (Denon – please note) and menus that scroll like they are on rails. Well-oiled rails, too – sometimes overshooting if your digital dexterity is a little tardy on the remote.

Setup is straightforward in manual mode and you have Audyssey 2EQ set-up with a supplied microphone for automated set up and basic room EQ. While romping through the Audyssey pick-n-mix shop, Onkyo also bagged Dynamic Volume and Dynamic EQ for this receiver – ensuring that the audio balance remains good from a quiet night in with a chick flick to a 'never mind the neighbours – feel the width' action movie fest. I prefer the latter.

Eschewing USB inputs and multichannel analogue inputs/outputs at this price point is bold, but I know why. The TX-SR608 is a home cinema receiver through and through. It's geared up to rock your sofa with high-class hi-def material and it

pooh-poohs low-quality MP3 or compressed video with scarcely concealed disdain.

That cat's got claws!

Cutting straight into Marcus Miller's *The Panther* from the *Legends of Jazz* Blu-ray compilation, the Onkyo sounds rich and fulsome with a transient attack that leaves most mid-priced receivers wounded and bleeding. Each slap-bass note is carved into the air with precision and cranking up the volume shows plenty of muscular reserve. It keeps tight and focused even at the display's indicated THX reference level.

Not surprisingly, the all-action sequences of the mighty *Avatar* rip into the room with huge scale and immersive effects even in vanilla 5.1 mode. With all seven channels driven hard and filling the room, Dolby DPL IIz height proves a little more cohesive than the Audyssey's DSX height mode. Dialogue has a crisp, forward sound, never falling into excessive sibilance but making sure the spoken action is right up in front of the mix. Trimming maybe half a dB more from the centre channel seems

to present a more even balance across the front end and makes for a really smooth soundstage.

Moreover, unlike some of Onkyo's earlier budget receivers, the SR608's balance is not particularly volume dependent. It sounds fast and fruity from gentle listening all the way to ASBO reference level (which is between 5dB and 10dB above THX reference level, depending on your neighbours).

With the more emotionally intense *Up* on Blu-ray **the Onkyo continues to set the standard at this price.** Dialogue remains lucid and articulate without dominating the sound and the music swells with impressive cinematic scale. Quiet rear effects seem a little stuck inside the speakers rather than soaring out into the room, but this is not something you would notice unduly.

There are also a few 'noises' in evidence when the volume is high but the content silent; a constant gritty hiss and some very quiet very static-like noises every time a light or electric appliance is turned on around the house. It's certainly no

A HDMI hottie

With six HDMI inputs (one on the front fascia) and one output, this is specification of the highest order, especially when you consider that they are v1.4a types that will allow 3D passthrough from suitably-equipped sources to a 3D display

B It's a bind

Binding posts are available for up to nine speakers, although they are not ideal for accepting heavier gauge wires. Users can choose to bi-amp their front speakers, run a second zone, or experiment with height or width channels

C Console yourself

There are four digital audio inputs for set-top boxes, consoles, etc., but no output for recorders

D All very PC

Does your PC have analogue out? The TX-SR608 can convert analogue VGA to HDMI, ideal for media PC users

E Utility socket

This universal port is a proprietary interface into which you can plug an iPod dock or DAB+ tuner



worse than most budget receivers for noise, but if you like to feel your movies as much as hear them, expect to get a few pops and clicks.

There is good reason why **Onkyo chose Faroudja's proven DCDi scaling engine – because it works very well indeed.** Blowing the dust off *Heat* on DVD, the 1995 SD picture is given a whole new lease of life and crafted in near HD quality.

Using a 1080p projector and 120in screen you can still see a lot of softness in the edges and it lacks the depth of a Blu-ray transfer, but on a 42in LED Samsung TV it looked sharp and vibrant.

There were no syncing issues between the different displays and the receiver, no hiccups, no delays or flashing screens before everything shook hands and started talking to each other. In the brightly-lit heist scene, De Niro's craggy features are crisp and expressive and even as the camera pans up and down the high street the motion remains smooth and under control.

As the guns open up, echoing from the tall buildings, you are

treated to a master class in Dolby Digital entertainment. The Onkyo's speed and dynamics rise to the occasion with bullet-speed alacrity, creating a huge all-action theatre that justifies every penny of the 450 quid on its own. If you don't find yourself on the edge of your seat with your heart racing by the time De Niro is dragging a wounded Val Kilmer into the car, you should probably check you still have a pulse.

Beauty on the inside

So, a £450 AV bargain. A few things have to go to get a technology-packed unit down to this price – the speaker terminals wobble alarmingly and bend downwards if your cables are a bit weighty, the case-work is somewhat lightweight and each button press creates a tingy-rattle of a click – but you can't have everything. Neither can you fault the features, audio aplomb or the video performance of the TX-SR608. Add in the v1.4a HDMI's and the option of height or width channels and you have a solid Best Buy receiver that leaves its peers trailing in its wake.

Tech Labs

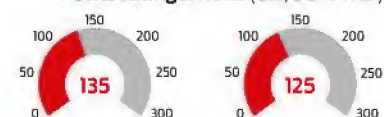
Power consumption: Watts



Idle: Clearly, quite a lot's going on even without signals to amplify

Powered: This seven channels-driven figure is quite high

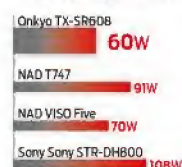
Power ratings: Watts (8Ω, 0.5% THD)



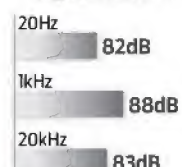
2-channel 8Ω: Onkyo's claims 160W per channel into 6Ω for the TX-SR608 – we measured a two-channel 8Ω figure of 135W

5-channel 8Ω: Again, our Tech Labs measured a solid power output, this time in five-channel mode

Untainted: Watts



Signal/noise: dB



Fidelity firewall:

A measurement of power untainted by distortion, this figure is slightly below par – probably due to Onkyo's in-built protection circuitry

S/N tests: Fair, but

not exceptional, results



HCC VERDICT

Onkyo TX-SR608
£450 Approx

Highs: Big, fast and dynamic sound; good video scaling; v1.4a HDMI's

Lows: No networking or USB; no 7.1 analogue in/out

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Surround sound supremos

Acoustic Energy is laying claim to the £1,000 speaker system crown with its revamped AEGIS Neo array. **Adam Rayner** kneels before the throne



These small scale cabinets will suit modest-sized rooms

Older and wrinklier readers may recall that I was once the original production manager for the guys who set up Acoustic Energy. This has meant that down the years I have been entrusted as the reviewer 'most likely to be critical' of what the brand has been doing since the departure of the original designer, Phil Jones to pastures new.

The back-story to AE's speaker know-how is worth a mention. Basically, Jones once had a broken subwoofer driver for his PA system and decided to fix it with Araldite. Inadvertently mixing too much, he idly covered the whole cone and, when it was set, tested it and discovered that it behaved

AV/CV

Product: Highly evolved, high tech and trendy 5.1 package

Position: Entry-level product for Acoustic Energy

Peers: Monitor Audio MA Bronze BR AV 5.1; Quad L-ite 2 AV 5.1; B&W MT-25

a bit differently: it was much more rigid and pistonic. Eureka!

This semi-accidental idea-sparker is how the (originally spun, now pressed) rigid, pistonic alloy AE cone came into being – that and a magic glue becoming available that finally allowed the manufacturer to really stick a foam surround well onto a hard anodised surface. The two combined to allow Jones to make his now-legendary rigid metal cone piston speaker: the AE1.

HCC's own Alvin Gold loved the AE1 and Acoustic Energy took off on the back of his good review. The big deal was that the metal cones were thermally coupled to the voice coils, and heat wicked away so bloody fast, that there was no 'power compression' or tendency for it to get less loud as the voice coil in the speaker got so very hot, very fast.

Like the speed with which tinfoil cools, the Acoustic Energy's bizarre snap and attack was to do with this, and the resultant big bass from such small cones carved their legend.

Of course, the danger with legends is that they can become lost in the mists of time, and I always worry that the past will be forgotten and something will alter when they bring out new kit.

Thankfully, I needn't have worried.

The Aegis Neo V2 has the Janus touch, looking backwards and forwards in equal measure – and totally delivers the audio goods in the process.

Version 2.0

This set of new speakers, the Version Two of their popular Neodymium magnetted range, is now the entry-level for AE. No more widgety small boxes, just 'real ones'. So what has changed or remained with the Neo V2, then?

Well, one thing has stayed the same and that's the really high importance placed upon choice of HF device. In the original, it was a Mo Iqbal design bought in to grace the AE1; now, for the revamped AEGIS Neo, we have the newest iteration of the lovely bat-frequency-capable 'ring radiator' tweeter with a small pointy bit at the centre, looking at you from each main speaker.

In my 5.1 test setup, the four surround speakers are the AEGIS Neo One enclosure and the centre is the two-drivered 'Centre' product.

This last box is really interesting as it is called a '2.5-way'. This means

that while they have just two sizes of driver, tweet and mid, one is playing midbass on the passive crossover and the other driver is being sent much deeper material, again from the passive crossover inside being a three-way.

This extra layer of cunning in the passive is a bit new for the V2 I gather, along with posher components, including high quality Polypropylene capacitors, used in their make-up. Each speaker has a single set of binding posts, and nice chamfered front edges with pretty and substantial badging. Not wonky stick-ons like I've recently seen on some other brands, but precision-engineered jobs, one on each of grille and cabinet. Said grilles are brilliant and equipped with top-quality Neodymium grippers with Ferrous cabinet inserts (the same ones you'll find on Acoustic Energy's Reference series, apparently). These makes them stick like chewing gum to the underside of a desk and yet need no holes nor legs to hold them firmly. In my opinion, the whole look of this array is way above the £1,000 price tag.

Wonder woofer

The final ingredient in the package, the AEGIS Neo subwoofer, has a little nest of knobs on the rear panel that might look a bit daunting to the uninitiated, but turns out to be a nice variable phase knob and a really well thought out single parametric notch filter that lets you pick a point between 40 and 100Hz and pull out up to 12dB of boominess – just at the problem point. You can even adjust how wide or narrowly this affects the bass around that point, in case your room-boom is a bit harder to cure. It's a bit like having a fancy RoomEQ system at your disposal.

It's all the more surprising that this good stuff is brought to the table by a £400 woofer. Acoustic Energy has really thought this through: there are real, big benefits here but kept affordable and then discounted for this AEGIS Neo V2 package.

The sub's 8.75in driver plays in a sealed box and is now super-wobbly and extra efficient, so only needs that 200W amp to really hold and push out proper deep notes and big boomy hits in explosions.

After a decent mess about with the subwoofer's notch filter and other settings, I plugged myself into a control pod thing and became once more, tall, slender >





Curves in all the right places: The Neo Ones boast a sumptuous rounded wood finish

and a sort of mottled blue colour... Or in other words, I put my *Avatar* Blu-ray on.

Going for a song

One thing I hate about my job is the ruination of movies by clips, as I am passionate about cinema. It extends to hating too much trailerage and hype, so *Avatar* came with baggage and took ages for me to get around to spinning up. I regret that, as it is, of course, awesome. So in some ways, giving this affordable Acoustic Energy system this film to check out first item was a bit like giving a talent show kid a major diva's song to sing. Only **this system proved to be the talent-show equivalent of Alexandra Burke**. Heritage of a singing goddess and gorgeous to look at.

Yes there are limits to what a grand's worth of speakers can do, but the V2 system is an example of real engineering talent, and more than worthy of Phil Jones' heritage. He will be proud of you AE, I promise!

With Cameron's sci-fi extravaganza fired up, I was rewarded with a sound of sheer realism and scale. Open, full, detailed and utterly involving, it imaged beautifully with a really clean and crisp feel. It had weight and size that enabled me to believe in big trees being crunched or huge choppers crashing. Plus, Cameron's vision demands a soundtrack of huge jungle creatures

and whomping air-tubeworms and massive arrows zipping about – all to the basso thrum of some of the biggest held bass notes in cinema. The Neo V2 array ate it like a Titanotheres eats small trees.

The bonkers-good Neo V2 subwoofer is all about that truly special driver. It enables use of a smaller amp and drops deeply and with real grip and authority, especially if you use your filter well.

After extracting myself from the land of the Na'vi I tried the AEs with some multichannel music, too, and again was impressed, finding them rich and fulfilling, whereas a recent THX-certified set had let me down with lots of tinkle and no richness. These are luscious as long as you keep them on song. At a lower volume level, the sound became a bit less linear and fulsome, but wake up the driver suspensions and they will amaze. On the other hand, don't over-push them or they can get a tad congested and lose that headroom. So, keep them in the revband and they'll keep the hairs on your arms erect for hours.

Grand design

The Acoustic Energy Neo V2 speakers are absolutely outstanding value and I'd spend my own money on them, which is as good as it gets for a reviewer. Yes, the £1,000 speaker market is a tough place, but this system has the strength to fight off most challengers ●

→ Specifications

Acoustic Energy AEGIS Neo One

Drive Units: One 5.25in pressed alloy cone driver with Neodymium magnet and one 1in ring radiator tweeter, also with Neodymium magnet

Enclosure: 2-way, rear ported

Frequency Response: 60Hz-40kHz

+/-3dB

Sensitivity: 89dB (2.83V @ 1m)

Power Handling: 120Watts

Dimensions (off plinth): 182 (w) x 357 (h)

x 237(d)mm

Weight: 6Kg

Acoustic Energy AEGIS Neo Centre

Drive Units: Two 5.25in pressed alloy cone drivers with Neodymium magnets, one playing 200Hz to 3.5kHz, the other 200Hz and down and one 1in ring radiator tweeter, also with Neodymium magnet

Enclosure: 2.5-way sealed

Frequency Response: 75Hz-40kHz

+/-3dB

Sensitivity: 90dB (2.83V @ 1m)

Dimensions: 480(w) x 178(h)

x 195(d)mm

Weight: 9kg

Acoustic Energy AEGIS Neo Sub

Drive Units: One 8.75in paper cone with thermally bonded voice coil and long throw magnet system

Enclosure: Sealed

Frequency Response: -6dB @ 26Hz

On board power: 200W RMS Class D

Dimensions: 480(w) x 178(h)

x 195(d)mm

Weight: 9kg

Connections: Single phono input for mono LFE, plus paired phono inputs and outputs



HCC VERDICT

Acoustic Energy AEGIS Neo
£1,000 Approx

Highs: Delightful dynamism and excitement and crisply detailed imagery; sexy construction

Lows: You need some real expertise to set a notch filter by ear; or you need an RTA

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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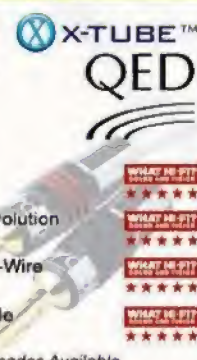


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PVR revisited

BT's latest IPTV unit is more v1.5 than v2.0 replacement, says **Steve May**



AV/CV

Product: BT-specific Freeview PVR with integrated VOD

Positioning: BT's sole IPTV proposition

Peers: Sky+ HD PVR, Virgin Media V+

With its blend of Freeview TV and video-on-demand services, BT's vision of the future was to prove insightful when first launched in 2007. But despite a forward-thinking agenda, the original BT Vision set-top box struggled against rival products from Sky and Virgin Media, dogged by content issues and a reputation for instability. All of which is a shame, as the interface was easy and efficient, and AV performance good.

Surprisingly, this long-awaited second edition of the set-top PVR, only available to BT Total Broadband subscribers, is little more than a cosmetic revamp of the original. To match the new Home Hub router, the livery is now gloss black and there's a circular Play/record wheel and natty blue light.

Technical specs haven't changed much; the hard drive is still 160GB and the EPG listing remains a convenient 14-day affair. Interestingly, there is now support for Dolby Digital Plus, the 5.1 surround sound standard capable of higher bitrates than the original. We've yet to see broadcasters adopt this, though.

This unit also has one foible not seen on its forebear – its tuner section can be intolerant of high aerial signal strength. Out of the box, it proved unable to find any channels during its

initial setup sweep. Only when the signal was attenuated did the unit find and tune Freeview. BT confirms such behaviour is possible, yet says the unit is within acceptable specs.

HD shortfall

It's worth noting that BT's second-gen unit doesn't support Freeview HD. That's a missed trick, as adding over-the-air HD to this PVR would have increased its appeal.

Subscription packages for VOD access are competitively priced, but there are only a limited number of HD movies to choose from within the BT environment. These download, rather than stream. There's also a selection of simple games to rent, but more useful is the provision of the BT phone book. You can store numbers of friends/family, and search using postcodes and address details.

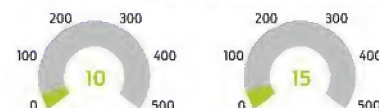
Where this new BT Vision+ unit has improved is with speed. You can whizz through the EPG with a level of casual abandon that would have caused the first-gen BT box to crash unapologetically.

While BT's On Demand services don't have much HD content on offer, the hardware is quite capable. The user interface itself can be output at 1080i or 720p and looks very sharp and attractive. The box also does a very good job of upscaling SD. Image quality is fine.

Ultimately, this is a nice-looking, easy to use PVR that desperately deserves an HD makeover, both in the VOD selection and tuner department. It's still well worth grabbing if you're a BT broadband subscriber, though.

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Standby: Power consumption is reasonable at 19W. The drives spin down when not in use (you set the Power-Down time from a menu)

In use: There's no measurable power consumption difference when the device is streaming

→ Specifications

Features: 160GB hard drive; 14-day EPG; 'Interactive' games that might amuse the old folks; integrated BT phone book; Dolby Digital Plus 5.1 support
Connections: 1 x HDMI; 2 x Scart; 1 x optical; 1 x S-video; stereo phono; Ethernet; USB; RF in/out; CI slot
Dimensions: 359(w) x 65(h) x 234(d)mm **Weight:** 7.8kg



HCC VERDICT

BT Vision+
£Free to BT Total Broadband users

Highs: Integration with BT Video On Demand IPTV; smart; fast; good upscaled SD picture quality

Lows: Tuner sensitivity issues; no Freeview HD tuner; limited hi-def content on VOD

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Sound barred

Adrian Justins questions the fundamental claims of LG's soundbar



LG describes the HLB54S as a super slim Blu-ray soundbar with a wireless subwoofer. That 'slim' adjective only applies to the sides of the soundbar, not its middle, which protrudes further than Beyoncé's backside. Be warned that because of the protruding rump and its flush-sited sockets, the HLB54S can't be wall mounted.

Aesthetically, the soundbar is pleasing enough and a good match for any black gloss TV, while the separate active subwoofer can be squirrelled away behind the sofa courtesy of wireless connectivity. The wi-fi wizardry extends to DLNA compliance that lets you stream pictures, music and videos from a PC or mobile phone to the soundbar.

Traditional cable-based connectivity includes inputs for Ethernet, digital optical audio, mini-jack audio and a front-mounted USB for playing media files. Dual HDMI inputs and one output confirm the useful presence of video switching, while a composite video output seems distinctly out of place.

An FM aerial socket and iPod connector for the supplied dock complete an impressive specification.

Behind the grille is 280W of front and 'rear' speaker power, whilst a 150W sub suggests plenty of LFE grunt.

LG's AV products are usually simple to set up and use. The HLB54S's menu layout and combination of modern fonts and graphical icons is hard to fault for user-friendliness.

Connecting to my broadband router involved no more effort than inserting the Ethernet cable in to the

soundbar, although the wireless sub did need manually pairing. More worrying was that the iPod dock took three attempts to recognise my iPod Touch and then had the gall to tell me to switch the TV connection from HDMI to composite video. The result was akin to smearing vaseline over my Panasonic TV's screen.

Other problems arise with USB media files. While the HLB54S was flaky with JPEGs and MP3s, it nonetheless happily played some MP4 and MPEG movie files, which look excellent using the HDMI.

The dedicated YouTube portal works flawlessly and the HLB54S does a fine job loading and playing Blu-ray and DVD movies, visually at least. With *District 9* on Blu-ray, human skin tones look natural, while every nuance and detail of the gungy-skinned alien prawns is rendered beautifully.

No dynamism

Sadly, audio performance is a disappointment by current soundbar standards, despite fine-tuning by audio guru Mark Levinson. The main unit's limited dynamic range means you get none of the expected improvement in power or clarity, especially at high volumes where you expect it most. The various DSP modes seem well suited to their genres but the Bypass mode is ineffective and does little to boost the overall impact. Too much is expected of the subwoofer, which lacks subtlety, and tends to swamp the higher frequencies.

So, while I applaud the HLB54S's video skills, usability and feature set, it's let down by mediocre sonics ●

AV/CV

Product:
Design-led
Blu-ray
soundbar with
wireless sub

Positioning:
LG's sole
soundbar in a
sea of 2.1 and
5.1 systems

Peers:
Samsung
HT-BD8200;
Panasonic
SC-BTX70;
Sony BDV-Z7

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Idling:
This figure is for the
soundbar and
subwoofer combined

Playing:
Consumption rises to
65W when the system
is running at a decent
volume level – at its
peak it'll draw 240W

Loading: Boot/Java

**Boot speed &
tray eject**

31s

**Tray in to
main BD menu**

45s

Disc loading & Java:
Fast and responsive
– note there's no actual
tray to eject

→ Specifications

Video upscaling: yes up to 1080p
Multiregion: no Region B (BD); R2 (DVD)
HDMI: yes 2 x v1.3 in and 1 output
Component: no
Multichannel phono audio: no
Digital audio: yes 1 x optical input
SACD/DVD-A: no/no Don't be daft
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: yes/yes
Profile 2.0: yes (requires USB flash
memory drive)
Dimensions (system unit): 998(w) x
84(h) x 189(d)mm
Weight (system unit): 5.3kg
Also featuring: 1080p/24 playback; FM
radio; CD playback; DLNA wi-fi/
Ethernet; 150W subwoofer; 4 x 70W
integral front speaker; iPod dock
supplied; YouTube playback; BD-Live;
AVCHD/MP3/WMA/JPEG/mkv/
MP4/DivX/XviD playback; DSP
modes

HCC VERDICT

LG HLB54S
£600 Approx

Highs: HDMI inputs; excellent Blu-ray
and DVD picture quality

Lows: Thin, raspy sound; flaky media
playback; awkward-shaped bar

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



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professional range 2160p rated 3m	HDHDC3	£39.99
plug professional range 2160p rated 7.5m	HDHDC75	£69.99

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Composite-video to component	CPVSRGB	£44.28
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Code FICS

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Universal soldier

Jim Hill discovers that Cambridge Audio's long-awaited player is built for Blu-ray, but has a musical side, too

Cambridge Audio's debut Blu-ray player could be the all-rounder you've been waiting for. It won't stream YouTube clips in 3D or stream MP3s from your PC, but plays every music and film format to a high standard, bridging hi-fi and home cinema divide.

While Sony and Samsung are locked in an escalating features war, CA has sidestepped it with a deck optimised for performance. It also offers universal support for DVD-Audio and Super Audio CD. These two hi-res formats have gone quiet in recent years, but this machine extracts every morsel of data from them. It even arrived with the DVD set to multiregion.

Prioritising pictures and sound is refreshing, but another key feature is the multichannel analogue output and on-board audio decoding. So if you have a legacy AV receiver predating HDMI v1.3, you can connect the seven analogue connections and

hear DTS-HD Master Audio and uncompressed SACD soundtracks in all their multichannel glory. It prompted me to reinstate my superb, but technically defunct, Denon AVC-A1. This means foregoing the convenience of video switching and connecting the HDMI lead directly to the TV instead.

The player is reassuringly heavy and it's clear that build quality is a major issue. The low-resonance casing is made of metal with a thick aluminium faceplate and stands on rubber vibration absorbing feet. All this damping means a particularly stable disc mechanism and optimum conditions for playback.

You have options

Key connections are the HDMI v1.3 port and multichannel analogue outputs, but CA has generously included two USB ports. You already have 1GB of on-board storage for BD Live content, so that's

AV/CV

Product:
Blu-ray player

Positioning:
Mid-range performance player aimed at audiophiles

Peers:
Sony BDP-S570;
Pioneer BDP-LX52

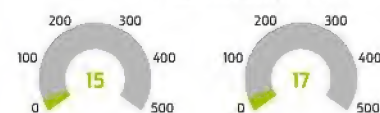
two more ways of inputting other media files.

The USBs aren't limited to certain types of media, like Sony's USB ports often are, so you can play any music, video, or picture files directly from any USB storage device and not just flash drives, but high capacity external hard drives too. Click on the USB input from the onscreen menu and you'll see the entire playable contents of your storage device.

The user interface has evolved from DVD days into a simple and intuitive series of menu pages. From here, you can let the player know how big your speakers are and how they are set up to optimise the surround sound from the multichannel outputs as well as choosing the output resolution and colour spacing. It's not as slick as Sony's GUI, but it's easier to use than Pioneer's convoluted menu system and Samsung's pictorial interface. The remote is rather basic and lacks backlighting.

Tech Labs

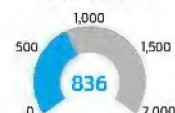
Power consumption: Watts



Idling: Power consumption here is high for BD player

Playing: Spinning a disc doesn't change power use by much

Audio jitter: Ps



Analogue: Not up there with the hi-fi elite, but a respectable figure

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & tray eject

7s

Tray in to main BD menu

50s

Disc loading & Java: Pretty quick to get up and running

Specifications

Upscaling: yes All resolutions up to 1080p

Multiregion: no Region B Blu-ray – but the DVD drive is multiregion

HDMI: yes 1 x v1.3

Component: yes 1 output

Multichannel analogue: yes 7.1 phono outputs

Digital audio: yes Optical and coaxial

SACD/DVD-A: yes/yes Hi-res audio lovers rejoice

Dolby True HD/DTS HD decoding: yes/yes

Dolby True HD/DTS HD bitstream: yes/yes

Profile 2.0: yes

Dimensions: 430(w) x 312(d) x 85(h)mm

Weight: 4.1kg

Also featuring: 1GB internal storage; 2 x USB



The OSD will look familiar to those who saw Oppo's BDP-831 deck (not available in Europe) – as both brands use a Mediatek chipset. That's not to say that the 650BD is identical to the Oppo player, though, and CA are keen to stress that they have no relation to that brand.

Getting down to spinning a Blu-ray disc is rewarding. Disc loading is pretty quick and picture quality is clean and pure. Delving into the menu and optimising the settings to output a 1080p 24 with Deep Colour set to 36bits gives a natural image not enhanced by artificial frame creation and colour boosting.

Watching *Into The Wild* (BD) reveals the fine detail it's capable of and the lack of unwanted video noise. Concentrate on the pale blue backdrop of the Alaskan sky and you'll see a clearer and more consistent colour than the grainy image of lesser machines. **There's no judder, smearing during fast motion or sweeping camera pans**, either.

Audio quality is excellent. If you're using the HDMI port, you have on board decoding for the latest audio formats including Dolby True HD and DTS-HD Master Audio Essential. The 'Essential' tag implies that onboard decoding covers the later versions, while assuming the amp can handle basic DTS 5.1 soundtracks.

If you're using the multichannel analogue audio outputs with a legacy AV receiver, you can get even better results. The Cambridge player uses

Build for blast:

It's all about the pictures and sound

eight Crystal 24bit/192kHz DACs to convert these signals to analogue ones and the result is superbly dynamic through a high-end amplifier with outdated format compatibility.

Stepping down to DVD is accompanied by a drop in picture clarity, but the scaling is very good. If you have an older HD Ready TV with a native 720-line resolution, you'll get great results by outputting 720p. Upscaling to 1080p is more demanding, but still better than most DVD players. It also plays US DVDs from the box. It's just a shame there's no region hack for Blu-ray... yet.

This machine is at home playing AVC HD, MKV and almost any other video file. Significant though, is its talent for playing audio discs. The designers at CA have come up with a finely tuned Blu-ray spinner that also makes a fine CD player. Our lab tests showed very low video jitter readings, which is good news for audio playback through the analogue outputs. The Pure Audio circuit helps maintain that purity. It's a fast, dynamic sound that's also open and revealing. Jazz and classical tunes benefit from a realistic tonal balance.

If you have any SACD or DVD-Audio discs, this deck will have you dusting them off and dazzling visitors used to their compressed MP3s.

This machine can make all of your discs, from CD, through DVD to Blu-ray, look and sound their best. CA has managed it by streamlining the features and concentrating on build quality. I approve wholeheartedly ●



HCC VERDICT

Cambridge Audio Azur 650BD
£400 Approx

Highs: Bulletproof build quality; speedy disc mechanism; excellent sound in Pure Audio mode; crisp picture quality

Lows: Not many features on offer here

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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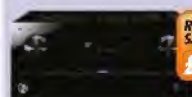


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RRP: £249.95
SAVE: £100

£149.95

WHAT IF IT? ★★★★★
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JUNE 2010

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SAVE: £100

Look! No wires

Martin Pipe tests a unique system for transmitting HDMI

We're never satisfied, are we? Having replaced the confusion of multiple analogue cabling with a single do-it-all digital standard, HDMI, we now we want it to be wireless. While Panasonic's Z1 was the first flatpanel TV with integral wireless concessions, there are ways of adding these functions to an existing system. One solution is CYP's CWHDI-TXRX, a premium-priced product which uses the 5.1 to 5.4GHz RF range, and comprises a transmitter and a receiver.

In our tests with a Full HD TV and a

Blu-ray player, I got good results from a range of 20ft – there was no perceptible loss of quality compared to a direct cable connection. A range of 30m is theoretically possible in the open air – results will, of course, vary indoors.

Highs

- This is easy to set up and use. There's even a three-input switcher on the transmitter.
- All video standards are catered for, from 480i to



1080p24, with 30bit RGB or 4:4:4 component colour. It also supports CEC, and so you'll be able to control gear located in another room.

Lows

- Hi-def audio isn't catered for – the best you can hope for is Dolby/DTS 5.1 or two-channel PCM.

Not totally wireless: Don't forget both the transmitter and receiver have to be connected to the mains



HCC VERDICT

CYP Wireless CWHDI-TXRX
£700 Approx

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

POGOPLUG → £100 Approx → www.pogoplug.com

Doing the pogo

A remote access NAS box? **Martin Pipe** is tickled pink

Maybe this NAS should be known as an IAS? For the main advantage of the Pogoplug is that anything stored on it can, with the minimum of hassle, be accessed securely from any web browser in the world courtesy of the my.pogoplug.com service. It's also

possible to upload files to the Pogoplug from a remote location.

One reason for its affordability is that no storage is included – you plug in your own, via USB. The Pogoplug also sports a UPnP media server, so that you can stream files to other devices on your home network.

– and an 'Active Copy' feature can automate the copying of content from networked computers to Pogoplug storage.

- Integrates with Twitter, Facebook and MySpace. There's also a free iPhone app, which streams content from your Pogoplug.

Highs

- Easy to install, and works well with any USB memory stick or hard drive with MacOS, Linux or Windows FAT32/NTFS file systems. Up to four different USB devices can be connected simultaneously.
- It's a great concept. I was able to access photos remotely, because I had transferred my archive to a drive hanging off the Pogoplug at home

Lows

- No Wi-Fi, and so you'll need to run an Ethernet cable to your router.
- Not full UPnP – I tried to get playback from a range of different devices (including Samsung BD deck, A.C. Ryan media player) with varying results.
- It's pink.



HCC VERDICT

Pogoplug
£100 Approx

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

In Brief

Kick Ass:
Creating the
Comic, Making
the Movie
Titan Books
£18 approx



One of the better *Making of...* books to surface in recent years, this is packed full of photos, artwork and – best of all – genuinely informative commentary about the comic and the film from the writers, artists, actors and filmmakers

1 2 3 4 5

SUPPLYING QUALITY ACCESSORIES & ADVICE
TO AV ENTHUSIASTS FOR OVER 25 YEARS

Lektropacks

RedEye

Less clutter. More control.



Redefining Control

With the RedEye system you can use your iPhone, iPod touch, or iPad to control your TV, stereo, cable box, DVD player, and many other devices that receive standard (infrared) signals. Your **iPhone**, **iPod touch**, or **iPad** communicates with the RedEye device via Wi-Fi, which sends commands to your home entertainment center via infrared.

Personal

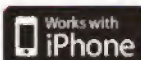
Each person in your house can use their own iPhone, iPod touch, or iPad as a controller, and more than one controller can interact with your AV equipment.

Smart

Multi-touch gestures for common functions, free software upgrades delivered through iTunes, the ability to control different rooms from anywhere in the house - all cheaper than other universal remotes.

(Model Ref: Redeye-1)

£189.00 inc.VAT



Approved
CYP
Distributor



CYP - **CWHD-TxRx** Wireless HDMI System
Was **£765.26**

Limited offer! Now **£688.75** inc.VAT

CYP - **AU-D3** Digital to Analogue Audio Converter

£42.41 inc.VAT



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stories you want to talk about _

So come along and talk. If you're passionate about technology, you'll find lots to keep you interested and plenty of ways to have your say.



Blu-ray on a budget

SONY BDP-S370

£150 Approx

Sony's Monolithic Design is wafer thin and comes with a superb user interface, Super Audio CD compatibility and online content including BBC's iPlayer

PANASONIC DMP-BD65

£180 Approx

This high-spec Blu-ray spinner majors on picture quality with Panasonic's own PHL chroma processing promising more accurate colour reproduction



The latest BD spinners offer more than ever before, but cost less than you might think. **Jim Hill** referees this budget battle

THE TEST

We chose four similarly priced and specified players that you might think would produce the same results, but close testing showed otherwise.

Objective testing revealed audio and video jitter readings. Then for the subjective testing, each deck was wired to a test cinema

comprising a Marantz SR6003 AV receiver, M&K THX 6.1 speaker system, Philips Essence 42in TV and Epson EH-TW5500 1080p projector.

Software included *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy on Blu-ray and the same films on DVD. Nick Drake's *A Treasury* hybrid Super Audio CD was used for additional audio testing, while various test

patterns and other digital file formats were accessed from a USB flash drive and an external hard disc drive.

With close watching, listening and A to B comparisons we've been able to rate the players performance and come up with an overall ranking that also takes features, design and ease of use into account.

SAMSUNG BD-C6500

£180 Approx

Samsung's player claims the fastest disc mechanism of the lot and offers heaps of online apps. It's also the only player here with 7.1 analogue outputs

LG BD560

£150 Approx

As well as playing BDs, LG's deck will upscale your DVDs, stream content from your PC and give you YouTube access. The new GUI makes it all easy to use, too



After a faltering start, Blu-ray has well and truly come of age. It was always meant to be the successor to DVD and now that the discs and players have become almost commodity items in the supermarket, there's really no excuse to put off that upgrade into the world of high-definition entertainment.

In fact, the players themselves have become much more than just HD disc spinners, as these feature-laden machines prove. As well as dipping to tantalizingly low price points, these budget boxes will also juggle your other digital media files through USB ports, or stream them from your PC. And the Ethernet ports, that were originally intended just for grabbing BD-Live content, now invite all manner of clever online widgets, including BBC iPlayer and LoveFilm downloads. Of course, different brands are taking different approaches to Blu-ray hardware, so consumer options vary quite a lot even at the low end of the market.

We've called in four entry-level machines from the big four brands to show you just what each one will give you for your pocket money.

Design

Interestingly, all four major brands have come to a similar design conclusion; keep it slim and minimal. LG's black fascia is completely seamless, just like the brand's Infinia TV range. The disc drawer controls and front USB port are all hiding behind the glossy front flaps. Even the remote shares the same shiny finish, with luminous keys to highlight the main function controls.

Switch it on and a particularly attractive home screen greets you with five icons frozen in ice cubes bobbing gently on the aquatic background. It's the most appealing GUI of the bunch, in fact.

Panasonic hasn't changed the look of its deck much from last year, and its fascia is still festooned with logos. The only unique one, though, is the AVCHD badge, which,

combined with the SD card slot behind the front flap, means instant playback of your HD footage from a Panasonic camcorder.

The Panasonic GUI is functional rather than flashy, and looks in need of a refresh to keep up with the other three players.

Samsung's attractive design has a neat fascia that springs to life when you power the deck up. It reveals a large display and illuminated touch-sensitive buttons. You have

DESIGN

Round-up: Slim and minimalist is the theme across all four of these decks, but it's LG that carries it off the best, with controls neatly hidden away and complemented by an attractive GUI. The Sony BDP-S370 mixes a great interface and remote with prohibitively small buttons and a strange angular design. As is usual for Panasonic, function takes precedence over form

LG BD560: 1 2 3 4 5

Panasonic DMP-BD65: 1 2 3 4 5

Samsung BD-C6500: 1 2 3 4 5

Sony BDP-S370: 1 2 3 4 5

LG BD560 → £150 → www.lge.co.uk



In brief

LG's BD560 may retail for £150, but it isn't the brand's entry-level BD spinner – that accolade goes to the £110 BD350.

Where the 560 improves on its stablemate is with higher-quality video DACs, DivX/DivXHD and MPEG file support and the small matter of an Ethernet connection, which means it confirms to the Blu-ray Disc Association's Profile 2.0 (the

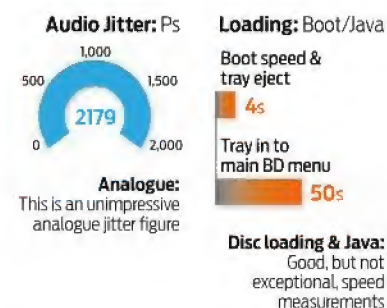
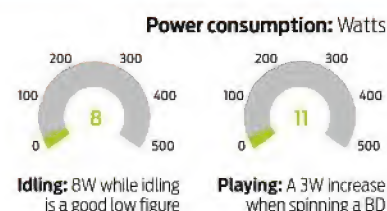
BD350 doesn't) and offers direct YouTube access.

The unit is attractively styled and will be a good aesthetic match to the brand's new range of flatscreen TVs. General usability is also excellent, with the BD560's GUI especially deserving of praise.

Step up Blu-ray decks in the LG lineup are currently the BD570 and 3D-capable BX580.

Hidden:

The LG's USB port is tucked away behind a flap in the glossy fascia



to look even closer to see the flap protecting the USB port, though. It comes with the largest handset, which some might call clumsy, but it's the easiest to use if you have Mr Blobby-like fingers. This applies to the onscreen menu as well, which appears as a choice of five pictorial icons on a wood-effect background.

Sony's is certainly the thinnest Blu-ray player around at just 36mm high and the buttons are comically small too, which only serves to make them harder to see. And really, that jutting control panel should really be a flap to stop dust getting into player's USB port. Its outward design flaws are a particular pity because **the remote is a typically satisfying Sony design** and the user interface is the most intuitive of the lot. It's based on the same XrossMediaBar that the PlayStation 3 console uses.

Features

It's really the feature set that differentiates Blu-ray players at the

budget end of the market and the four leading brands are competing hard to come up with a clever new function, or an exclusive app.

LG is playing catch up with its NetCast internet applications, which now include YouTube, Picasa and AccuWeather widgets. They're not as sophisticated as Sony and Samsung's online offerings, but they open fairly quickly from the excellent onscreen menu. The Gracenote feature, which grabs album artwork and track names for music files worked very well with my chosen-at-random Nick Drake CD. The DivX HD compatibility could be useful, too, if you plan to stream downloaded videos straight from your PC.

Panasonic lists Extra Fast Boot Time as one of the key features of the DMP-BD65, but our Tech Labs rated it as the slowest of this quartet. Much more impressive is the brand's Reference Chroma Processing Plus picture-enhancing feature, which promises more accurate colour fidelity. More about that later.

Of course, Panasonic has its own ring-fenced web content, too. Viera Cast, as it is known, is a modest collection of apps including Picasa, YouTube, and not much else. There are spaces for two more apps that simply say 'coming soon' and one of those will almost certainly be for LoveFilm. There's an optional wireless dongle available from Panasonic in case your Ethernet cable won't reach.

Panasonic's player is the only one to offer an SD card slot and both AVCHD and DivX HD compatibility, which is good news for anyone with an SD camcorder. Significantly, that USB port on the front is able to read both flash and hard drive USB devices, unlike the one on Samsung's BD-C6500.

Despite that, the BD-C6500 is actually a step up from Samsung's entry-level player, meaning you get Wi-Fi built in, and multichannel analogue outputs. Samsung also has a few more widgets to offer, including YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, and Rovi TV >

PANASONIC DMP-BD65 → £180 Approx → www.panasonic.co.uk



In brief

Similar to LG's BD560, Panasonic's DMP-BD65 isn't actually the company's most affordable Blu-ray deck Penny-pinchers can look to the DMP-BD45, but be aware that that machine only meets the Profile 1.1 spec, so BD-Live is a no-show.

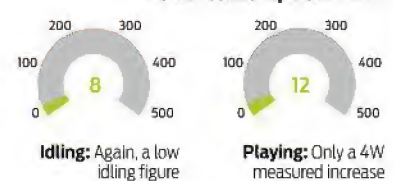
The DMP-BD65 continues Panasonic's tradition of favouring function over form – in place of snazzy graphic interfaces you

get quality audio and video performance.

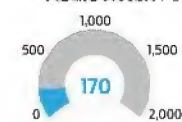
The feature set of this £180 player includes access to the VieraCast online portal, but this isn't as content-rich as the offerings from rivals Samsung and Sony.

Inner beauty: The DMP-BD65 packs Panasonic's Reference Chroma Processing Plus tech

Power consumption: Watts



Audio Jitter: Ps



Analogue: An excellent result – audiophile class

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & tray eject

3s

Tray in to main BD menu

65s

Disc loading & Java: Speedy boot-up but not the fastest deck to load our test title



listings. They're not the fastest to open, though, and I found Rovi proved slightly glitchy. What could turn out to be the best two widgets this year, LoveFilm and BBC iPlayer, are both due to arrive as a firmware update on the Samsung player any day now.

With the S370, Sony takes the web content the furthest, with a huge range of apps that open quickly from the XMB interface – and include a great version of BBC iPlayer and a host of streamable films from LoveFilm. You can even watch the LoveFilm trailers in high-definition, which is a neat touch.

It's also surprising, and welcome, to see Super Audio CD compatibility on a budget machine like this. We've got used to seeing support for this and DVD-Audio only on premium-priced disc-spinners, so reckon Sony should be given credit where it's due.

Performance

LG's handsome machine, doesn't just look good, it's also very nice to

use thanks to the watery graphics on the menu page that invite you in. It can put out a decent 1080p24 Blu-ray image with a neutral colour balance, but it's not the best here.

By comparison, the reds and greens in *The Lord of the Rings* look a little pale and blacks could be darker. You'll see an occasional judder during long and wide camera pans, too. It's a similar story when upscaling from DVD. The image is obviously softer than Blu-ray, but it's greyer and more washed out.

Audio-wise, however, it's hard to find fault with the *LOTR*'s Blu-ray's DTS-HD Master Audio track outputted through the HDMI port.

Panasonic has put the emphasis on picture quality rather than features with its DMP-BD65, and it shows in the particularly crisp and clean Blu-ray image. Presumably, the brand's Reference Chroma Processing Plus has something to do with the accuracy and steady transition of the colours here. The idyllic view of The Shire in Chapter

Two of *LOTR* looks incredibly lush and vibrant. It looks like the greens have been enhanced a little in post production for this scene, and the Panasonic reproduces them faithfully.

Audio quality via HDMI is bang-on, too. It's just a pity Panasonic hasn't got around to refreshing the horrible user interface yet. The others make this GUI look primitive.

Samsung's onscreen home page also looks a bit messy compared to those of LG and Sony, but it's the

FEATURES

Round-up: The feature sets of these decks vary considerably. Sony leads the way with apps aplenty and an impressive interface; the Samsung matches it with plenty of widgets and Wi-Fi built in; Panasonic's strengths here lie in its picture processing power and camcorder friendliness rather than its interactive powers

LG BD560: 1 2 3 4 5

Panasonic DMP-BD65: 1 2 3 4 5

Samsung BD-C6500: 1 2 3 4 5

Sony BDP-S370: 1 2 3 4 5

SAMSUNG BD-C6500 → £180 → www.samsung.co.uk



In brief

Samsung's BD-C6500 crams in a few features that only a year ago would have been unheard of on a player at this price – multichannel 7.1 analogue outputs, 1GB of internal memory, access to online apps and built-in Wi-Fi. If (some) of these are of no interest to you, then the Korean giant also makes the BD-C5500, which you can snap up for around £110.

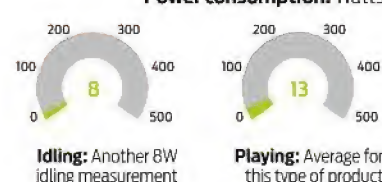
The BD-C6500 presents a sleek but dark fascia until you power up the

unit – only then are its touch sensitive controls illuminated.

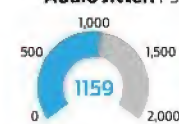
The Internet@TV function is a gateway to a growing collection of online apps, including Twitter and Flickr, with more enticing ones supposedly on the way. If you're not in the mood to shell out for a net-enabled flatscreen, then this Samsung deck may appeal for this reason alone.

Light show: Samsung's player features illuminated touch-sensitive controls

Power consumption: Watts



Audio Jitter: Ps



Analogue: An average figure, but not as bad as the LG BD560

Loading: Boot/Java

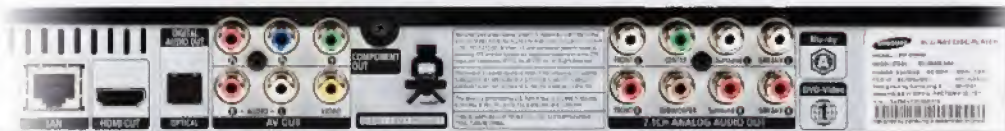
Boot speed & tray eject

3s

Tray in to main BD menu

47s

Disc loading & Java: Speedy boot-up and fast Java loading



fastest deck in this roundup to boot, and isn't too tardy at spinning a disc either, getting to the menu screen of our Tech Labs test platter in 45 seconds.

Once my *LOTR* BD was up and running, the picture looked bold and vibrant with slightly over-enthusiastic colours on the standard setting. Switching to Cinema mode delivered a more realistic image. There was an element of video noise just visible in the backgrounds, and on dark surfaces like the round green door of Bilbo's Hobbit hole in Chapter Three.

I also encountered a couple of occasions when a DVD froze during playback. It's a shame the picture quality isn't quite as polished as the design.

Sound quality through the HDMI port is pretty good, and I'd advise using this rather than the analogue outputs, if you have the option. At this price point, something has to give and you simply can't expect Samsung to spec top-notch DACs

(digital audio converters) in its low-end players – you're better off letting your AVR do the work.

Sony's deck starts up a fraction quicker – and offers an image that leaps from the screen, too. The colours actually looked a little pumped up, but there was absolutely no sign of picture noise or judder – or any other video nasties for that matter. Furthermore, switching to the DVD release of *LOTR* didn't mean quite such a drop in picture clarity as I was expecting, which proves **the video scaler is doing a good job of converting the standard-definition signal to 1080p.**

Movie sound quality doesn't vary much from player to player, but this deck has an obvious advantage with my Nick Drake hybrid SACD. The DSD data stream you get from Super Audio CD is uncompressed, and the result is a much wider dynamic range and an appreciable improvement in sound quality. Audiophiles take note. >

PERFORMANCE

Round-up: Sony's BDP-S370 shows no picture weaknesses and impresses with its SACD playback; the Panasonic DMP-BD65 runs it close in the AV department; Samsung's deck may be quick but has some picture inconsistencies

LG BD560: 1 2 3 4 5

Panasonic DMP-BD65: 1 2 3 4 5

Samsung BD-C6500: 1 2 3 4 5

Sony BDP-S370: 1 2 3 4 5

SONY BDP-S370 → £150 Approx → www.sony.co.uk



In brief

Sony's BDP-S370 is actually the brand's entry-level model – the big S has no truck with £100 Profile 1.1 machines.

It's breathtakingly thin and curiously angular, but the S370 has a couple of surprises up its sleeve – most notable compatibility with the often-ignored Super Audio CD format and instant access to BBC iPlayer and LoveFilm via the Bravia Internet Video platform.

The control interface, based on Sony's XrossMediaBar, is nicely intuitive – as is the supplied remote control.

Where this machine falls slightly short of some of its rivals is the lack of built-in Wi-Fi – but you can buy a wireless dongle if you're cable-phobic.

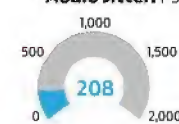
Well-stocked:

The entry-level BDP-S370 has an impressive amount of features

Power consumption: Watts



Audio Jitter: Ps



Analogue: Another excellent analogue jitter result

Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & tray eject

5s

Tray in to main BD menu

42s

Disc loading & Java: Fast booting and disc loading



Final standings

Awarding overall scores is a case of taking design, features, ease of use and ability into account with picture quality being the primary factor.

Samsung's deck is one of the fastest to load and play a disc and seems to offer a remarkable level of features. In reality, the multichannel output isn't much of an advantage at this price, the USB port can only read flash drives, and while onboard Wi-Fi could be useful, it's not as reliable as a wired connection. More importantly, picture quality is below average.

LG's deck looks just as slick and the interface is much more attractive, and easier to navigate. It doesn't have as many online attractions, but the picture is a little more stable, so it's a better machine on the whole.

Panasonic's plain deck has the most muddled interface of the lot, but it has it where it counts. In other words, the picture



quality is appreciably better with no grainy video noise or motion judder. The USB slot can access high-capacity hard drives and the SD slot is a real bonus for quickly viewing digital camera footage.

I'm not a fan of the Sony's curious front panel design, but concede that the onscreen interface is the best, and the picture quality

is near perfect. It upscales DVDs accurately, plays SACDs admirably, and makes it easy to access files on an external hard drive.

These are the aspects that make a Blu-ray player so much better than a DVD player and enjoyable to use. Add in some key apps like BBC iPlayer and Lovefilm and you have an all-round performer and a clear winner ●

1ST



HCC VERDICT

Sony BDP-S370
£150 Approx

Highs: Slim case; vibrant image; SACD playback; superb interface; useful web features
Lows: Fascia design; no memory card slots

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

3D: NO
Upscaling: YES All resolutions up to 1080p
Multiregion: YES Region B BD/R2 DVD
HDMI: YES Version 1.4
Component: YES one output
Multichannel analogue: NO
Digital audio: YES Optical and coaxial outputs
SACD/DVD-A: YES But just SACD
Dolby True HD/DTS-HD decoding: YES/YES
Dolby True HD/DTS-HD bitstream: YES/YES
Profile 2.0: YES With BD Live
Dimensions: 430(w) x 36(h) x 206(d)mm
Weight: 2kg
Features: 2 USB ports; on line streaming of BBC iPlayer and others

2ND



HCC VERDICT

Panasonic DMP-BD65
£180 Approx

Highs: Clear and stable picture; vivid colours; useful SD slot with AVC HD playback
Lows: Limited web apps; clunky interface; disc mechanism

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

3D: NO
Upscaling: YES All resolutions up to 1080p
Multiregion: YES Region B BD/R2 DVD
HDMI: YES Version 1.4
Component: YES one output
Multichannel analogue: NO
Digital audio: YES optical
SACD/DVD-A: NO Just regular DVD and CD
Dolby True HD/DTS-HD decoding: YES/YES
Dolby True HD/DTS-HD bitstream: YES/YES
Profile 2.0: YES With BD Live
Dimensions: 430(w) x 49(h) x 207(d)mm
Weight: 1.9kg
Features: One USB 2.0 ports; on line streaming via Wi-Fi dongle

3RD



HCC VERDICT

LG BD560
£150 Approx

Highs: Handsome styling; attractive GUI; nice remote; decent picture
Lows: Some grainy video noise; limited online web content

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

3D: NO
Upscaling: YES All resolutions up to 1080p
Multiregion: YES Region B BD/R2 DVD
HDMI: YES Version 1.4
Component: YES one output
Multichannel analogue: NO
Digital audio: YES Optical and coaxial outputs
SACD/DVD-A: NO Just regular DVD and CD
Dolby True HD/DTS-HD decoding: YES/YES
Dolby True HD/DTS-HD bitstream: YES/YES
Profile 2.0: YES With BD Live
Dimensions: 430(w) x 45(h) x 207(d)mm
Weight: 2kg
Features: On line streaming via NetCast to YouTube; two USB 2.0 ports

4TH



HCC VERDICT

Samsung BD-C6500
£180 Approx

Highs: Slick looks; Wi-Fi built in; lots of online apps
Lows: Apps are slow to open; occasional video judder; USB port only reads flash drives

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

3D: NO
Upscaling: YES All resolutions up to 1080p
Multiregion: YES Region B BD/R2 DVD
HDMI: YES Version 1.4
Component: YES one output
Multichannel analogue: YES 7.1 channels of analogue audio
Digital audio: YES Optical
SACD/DVD-A: NO Just regular DVD and CD
Dolby True HD/DTS-HD decoding: YES/YES
Dolby True HD/DTS-HD bitstream: YES/YES
Profile 2.0: YES With BD Live
Dimensions: 430(w) x 43(h) x 223(d)mm
Weight: 9.6kg
Features: Two USB 2.0 ports; on line streaming with Lovefilm, YouTube and more

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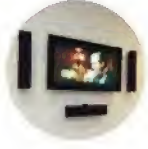


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Home Cinema

*...so good, being there
is the next best thing?*

How easy is it to buy a home cinema system that meets your expectations in terms of quality of picture and sound? You could read the magazine product reviews, find out who sells the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys at the cheapest price and place your order. When the system is delivered to your door in the box, you get a friend who knows his onions to install it - and live happily ever after.

This is a fairly well-trodden path but it leads to dissatisfaction and a lot of wasted money. Besides there being a bewildering choice of components on the market today, there are also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, plasma or LCD, an HD ready set or one with full 1080p capability? And on the audio side do you plump for a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub, and where do you site them for the best results? The choice of home cinema amp raises even more questions. Will you be listening to music through the same system? If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Do you need SACD, DVD-Audio, or Blu-ray capability? How many inputs do you need for video, s-video, component, coaxial digital, optical digital and HDMI? The above are just a small percentage of the decisions that must be made. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.

Achieving potential

To select a system, you could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that they will be a great combination. Maybe, but probably not. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer. This is almost certainly not the best route either as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis (that is without professional input) are performing at way below their optimum level. To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system. Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity.

Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.

What and Where to buy

To ensure a home cinema system is right for you, where do you start? Here's an important tip ... don't start with **WHAT**, start with **WHERE**. There's only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. It's possible you have preconceived ideas that put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and

guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. These are just myths.

Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit **you**.

Buying or being sold to?

There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the

“...the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis (that is without professional input) are performing at way below their optimum level.”



system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it performs to its best, and ensure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by recommendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

Getting the best deal

Unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.



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LISTED BELOW ARE 20 OF THE BEST AV SHOPS IN THE COUNTRY.

They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards home cinema systems that will provide years of superlative performance and total satisfaction.

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
SERVICE	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

OUR TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST AV DEALERS

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216 Moulsham Street. 01245 265245

Colchester RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
33 Sir Isaac's Walk. 01206 577682

Kingston-upon-Thames INFIDELITY
9 High Street, Hampton Wick.
020 8943 3530

Maidenhead AUDIO VENUE
36 Queen Street. 01628 633995

Rayleigh, Essex RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND
& VISION
44a High Street. 01268 779762
Custom Install Dept.
01268 776932

Southend-on-Sea RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND
& VISION
132/4 London Road. 01702 435255
Tunbridge Wells KENT HOME CINEMA
69 London Road, Southborough.
01892 535007

LONDON

Ealing AUDIO VENUE
27 Bond Street. 020 8567 8703

N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI
190a New North Road. 020 7226 5500
SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS
61-63 Webbs Road, Battersea.
020 7924 2040

MIDLANDS

Coventry FRANK HARVEY HI-FI EXCELLENCE
163 Spon Street. 024 7652 5200

Nottingham CASTLE SOUND & VISION
48/50 Maid Marian Way. 0115 9584404

Solihull MUSIC MATTERS
93-95 Hobs Moat Road. 0121 742 0254
NORTH

Chester ACOUSTICA
17 Hoole Road. 01244 344227

York SOUND ORGANISATION
2 Gillygate. 01904 627108

SCOTLAND

Aberdeen HOLBURN HI-FI
441 Holburn Street. 01224 585713/572729

Edinburgh LOUD & CLEAR
Bonnington Mill, 72 Newhaven Rd.
0131 555 3963

Glasgow GLASGOW AUDIO
135 Great Western Road.
0141 332 2200/4707



The majority of the above dealers are members of one or both of the major trade organisations, BADA or CEDIA.



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PLAYBACK

→ **Software highlights** **ALICE IN WONDERLAND** Remember what The Dormouse said? **THE BOOK OF ELI** Post-apocalypse holiday read **THE CRAZIES** Wild Romero remake **ASTRO BOY** More CG on BD **SPAGHETTI WESTERN TRILOGY** 'Hey, Blondie! You know what you are?' **THE KID** Chaplin goes HD **DR. STRANGELOVE** Kubrick classic finally on Blu-ray **AND MUCH MORE!**

Tanked up

Stargate Universe: The Complete First Season → Region A/B Blu-ray

Sci-fi grows up with this serious reinvention of the *Stargate* TV franchise, out on BD July 5. Get a preview of the deep water in which the team finds itself on p103...

HCC Ratings key

Star Wars	1 2 3 4 5
Star Trek	1 2 3 4 5
Starman	1 2 3 4 5
Star Fleet	1 2 3 4 5
Star Maidens	1 2 3 4 5

Helena Bonham-Carter's latest look needed a little work



Feed your head

Take a trip to Burton's psychedelic Wonderland on Blu-ray

Alice in Wonderland and Tim Burton: seem like a match made in Hollywood heaven. So why does the end result feel so forgettable? It's certainly not for want of visual panache – as expected Burton has unleashed the full extent of his Gothic fairytale imagination and let it run rampant through Wonderland (or Underland as the story would have it). But the narrative flounders, unsure of whether it's a remake or sequel, before settling down with a horribly predictable character arc for Alice (surely nothing should ever be predictable in Lewis Carroll's world of nonsense literature) that eventually transforms the film into an unwanted sibling of the Narnia franchise when it comes to a close with an epic battle between the armies of good and evil.

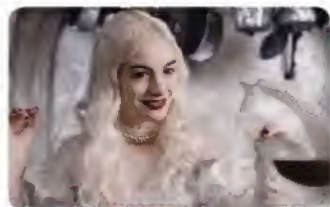
Mark Craven: Kudos to Disney for capitalising on this disappointing film's one real strength for this hi-def release and delivering a flawless image that really captures the wonder of Underland. Presented as an AVC 1080p codec at 1.78:1, Alice in Wonderland looks simply fabulous on Blu-ray. Whether it's the bookend sequences set in the real world (shot on film) or the bulk of the movie set down the rabbit hole (shot digitally against green screen), the image is always immaculate with fiery colours popping off the screen, blacks deep enough to lose yourself in, and masses of fine details.

Steve May: With its magical DTS 5.1 HD MA soundtrack, as soon as Alice plummets back down the hole, you're engulfed in a maelstrom of delicious aural fx which sets the tone for the action to come. The first attack by the Bandersnatch (Chapter 4) is a wonderful demo sequence, with the careening bulk of the great beast given weight, his roar a sonic storm. The score, by regular Burton collaborator Danny Elfman always seems a perfect

accompaniment. On the down side, the dialogue placement across the L/C/R is occasionally clumsy and uneven. Overall though, a great audio experience.

Anton van Beek: For such a special effects-packed major studio production, *Alice...* comes to Blu-ray with a surprisingly meagre collection of extras. Apart from the film, all that the Blu-ray disc has to offer is a trio of short production featurettes – *The Mad Hatter* (6 mins), *Finding Alice* (6mins) and *Effecting Wonderland* (7mins).

What makes this even more insulting is the fact that Disney's US BD release, has an additional nine featurettes looking at other characters and aspects of the production. This two-disc set also offers up a DVD copy of the film, presented anamorphically at 1.78:1 with DD5.1 audio.



HCC VERDICT

Alice in Wonderland → Walt Disney Home Entertainment → All-region BD/R2 DVD → £24 Approx

We say: Forgettable, but superb looking film. Extras are paltry

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



Edge of Darkness

Icon → All-region BD
£20 Approx



Based on the 1985 BBC miniseries of the same name, *Edge of Darkness* is a film that can't help but

disappoint those familiar with its source material. Director Martin Campbell (who also helmed the original) does his best, but there are too many ideas fighting for space – a real shame, as performances from Mel Gibson and Ray Winstone are great. The AVC 2.40:1 encode does a fine job, packing in plenty of fine detail, while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio makes good use of the full soundstage. Extras include four deleted scenes, nine featurettes and director's commentary. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Percy Jackson...

20th Century Fox → Region B/C BD
£29 Approx



Following slavishly in the footsteps of *Harry Potter*, albeit with Greek mythology replacing

magic, *Percy Jackson & The Lightning Thief* is a thoroughly unexceptional family action adventure flick. But for all of its many flaws as a film, it does at least look the business in hi-def thanks to this intricately rendered AVC 2.35:1 1080p encode. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio also delivers some godlike sonics during action scenes like the battle with the Hydra. Eight deleted scenes, three tiny behind-the-scenes featurettes and a guide to the characters in the film are part of the lacklustre extras. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Ninja Assassin

Warner Home Video → All-region BD
£27 Approx



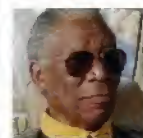
Now this is disappointing. Opening with an over-the-top slice of ultra violence, this

modern day Ninja flick then settles into a rather pedestrian mix of police investigations and interminable flashbacks before getting its martial arts mojo back for a ludicrous finale. While the film itself is a bit of a dog, Warner's VC-1 2.40:1 1080p encode is crystal clear – a good job too considering so much of the action takes place in the dark. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is equally strong and punchy. Disc extras are limited to three featurettes and five deleted scenes. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Invictus

Warner Home Video → All-region BD
£27 Approx



Dirty Harry makes our day with a movie about rugby (the sport, not the place). Well, almost. Clint

Eastwood's *Invictus* tells the true story of how Nelson Mandela tried to use the South African rugby squad as a rallying point to unite the post-Apartheid country during the 1995 World Cup. Thankfully, lead performances (Matt Damon and Morgan Freeman) manage to transcend the limitations of the narrative. The Blu-ray itself delivers natural-looking VC-1 2.40:1 imagery and an effective DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix. Extras include a picture-in-picture track and behind-the-scenes featurettes. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5



Read all about it

Taut script and solid encode render this post-apocalyptic actioner a cut above

The Book of Eli is easy to mistake for a run-of-the-mill post-apocalyptic actioner, complete with a kung fu-kicking hero (Denzel Washington), and wild-eyed villain (Gary Oldman). Yet Gary Whitta's layered, thoughtful script, married to the mesmeric direction of the Hughes brothers, adds real weight to this tale of a lone traveller with a mysterious possession he will kill to protect. With some outstanding set-pieces, a haunting soundtrack and first-rate performances (like Michael Gambon's cameo as a gun-toting survivalist), *Eli...* is a film you avoid at your peril.

Mark Craven: It's impossible to knock the AVC 2.40:1 1080p Blu-ray encode. Sourced directly from the film's original digital elements, *The Book of Eli* always looks razor-sharp, even if the post-apocalyptic setting generally means it's about as colourful as a sepia daguerreotype.

Steve May: Although a spiritual descendant of *Mad Max*, this fantasy is far removed from the

high-octane audio action of that classic franchise. The 5.1 DTS-HD Master Audio presentation here is moody, atmospheric and mesmerising. The sound mix is restrained yet perilous, artfully creating a grim world to match the bleached out visuals. The score, by Atticus Ross, also plays a large part.

Anton van Beek: *The Book of Eli* isn't exactly stacked with bonus goodies, but there's still good stuff for fans to sink their teeth into, all in 1080p. Best of the bunch is a Picture-in-Picture mode, providing a detailed account of the film's creation through an extensive collection of interviews, storyboards, concept art and more. There's also a pair of featurettes *Starting Over* (13mins) and *Eli's Journey* (18mins) that look at the process of rebuilding the world after an apocalypse and the film's themes and design respectively. Co-director Albert Hughes and composer Atticus Ross also talk briefly about the film's sound design in *The Book of Eli Soundtrack* (5mins).



HCC VERDICT

The Book of Eli → Entertainment in Video → Region B → £25 Approx

We say: Top-notch action flick given quality Blu-ray treatment.

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



Denzel soon regretted his decision to hitch

Mad men

Lo-fi Romero original benefits from a spiffing hi-def remake



The Crazies is a fine example of a remake done well. As much as we admire George A. Romero's 1973 original – about a small town under military quarantine after a man-made virus

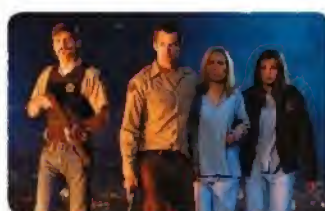
is accidentally unleashed – it struggles to match the scale of its ambition to the tiny budget it was made for. That certainly isn't the case with this astute update, which sacrifices none of the prescient chills of the original, and marries them to a much larger production. Great stuff.

Mark Craven: Looking approximately a million times as glossy as Romero's lo-fi original, this remake of *The Crazies* comes to Blu-ray with a pleasing VC-1 2.40:1 1080p encode. The film starts out looking pretty normal, with plenty of daylight scenes offering up strong detailing and sharpness (although the colours have clearly been tweaked substantially in post). As director Breck Eisner states in the commentary, 'Once the shit goes down... the movie gets darker, the images get more contrasty, the camerawork gets more intense' resulting in a more stylised look for the rest of the film, but rest assured that (barring some minor video noise in a handful of shots) it too survives the transition to high-definition just about perfectly.

Steve May: It's not often you come across a multichannel lossless PCM soundtrack these days, but when they surface you should treasure them – particularly when the 5.1 mix is as dynamic and engulfing as this. The sound design, by Jeremy Peirson (who did a similarly terrific job on *Watchmen*), elevates this way above the



'Did you have to put that cig out in the petrol station?'



HCC VERDICT

The Crazies
Momentum Pictures → Region B
BD → £25 Approx

We say: You'd have to be barking not to be impressed by this impressive Blu-ray package

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

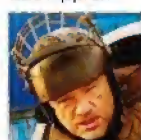
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

zombie-norm. There is some wonderful, unexpected use of the LFE channel – the huge thrum generated by an abandoned harvester is terrifying at volume – and panned aural effects, particularly some military fly-bys toward the end of the picture, are thrilling. The movie only occasionally resorts to sonic sucker punching, and the result is an infectiously satisfying experience.

Anton van Beek: While never delivering anything particularly spectacular, this Blu-ray version of *The Crazies* features a pretty decent stack of bonus goodies – all presented in HD. With regards to the making of the film itself, there's an affable solo chat-track by director Breck Eisner, an 11min behind-the-scenes featurette, two makeup featurettes (21mins in total), a 4min visual effects showreel, a gallery of storyboards for three sequences and a photo gallery. Rounding out the package is a 10 min featurette about George Romero and the political horrors he creates, and a Blu-ray exclusive collection of four *The Crazies: Motion Comics* (54mins in total) providing additional back-story for some of the film's infected.

Micmacs

E1 Entertainment → Region B BD
£25 Approx



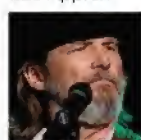
Amélie director Jean-Pierre Jeunet brings his brand of highly-stylised French whimsy to Blu-ray

with this comedy about a group of misfits setting out to destroy two big weapons manufacturers. The film isn't Jeunet's best by a long shot, but what really makes it sing in HD is the way that the AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode brings out the best in the hyper-detailed and colourful production design. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 French audio is just as inviting, making excellent use of the surrounds, while keeping the dialogue crystal clear. The sole extra is a 9min interview with the director. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Crazy Heart

20th Century Fox → Region A/B BD
£25 Approx



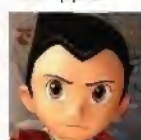
With its story about a washed-up alcoholic musician who eventually finds redemption, *Crazy*

Heart isn't the most original film ever made. But what it has going for it is Jeff Bridges, who definitely deserved the Oscar he picked up for his brilliant portrayal of country singer Bad Blake. It doesn't hurt that Blake's story also looks impressive on Blu-ray courtesy of a rich and satisfying AVC 2.40:1 encode. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix ensures that the music always sound great, although surround use is pretty limited throughout the entire track. The only disappointments are the extras. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Astro Boy

E1 Entertainment → Region B BD
£23 Approx



Osamu Tezuka's 58-year old manga icon gets a middling US makeover in this CG animated feature.

Visually attractive and voiced by an all-star cast, the problems stem from the unimaginative storyline – still, the slapstick humour will undoubtedly please the kids. Beautiful colours and razor-sharp detail are the order of the day with the disc's AVC 2.35:1 encode, while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics are thrillingly dynamic and enveloping. Extras include two new animated shorts, two behind-the-scenes featurettes, an art gallery and a DVD copy of the film. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

The Sky Crawlers

Manga Entertainment → Region B BD
£25 Approx



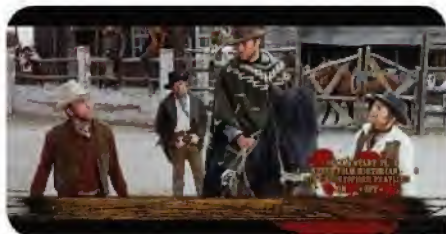
With a body of work that includes *Ghost in the Shell* and the magnificent *Patlabor* movies, Mamoru

Oshii has become one of the key players in contemporary anime. With this offering, the combination of 2D and CG 3D animation is well-served by the AVC 1.78:1 encode, and while it can look a little soft at times, we have a feeling this was an aesthetic choice. Japanese and English audio comes in DTS-HD MA 5.1 and LPCM 2.0 incarnations, while extras include a 15min interview with Oshii, three trailers and two half-hour documentaries on animation research and sound design. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Pasta la vista, baby!

The good, the great and the best Sergio Leone flicks get the BD makeover



The Spaghetti Western Trilogy brings to Blu-ray Sergio Leone's groundbreaking trio of Italian westerns that turned Clint Eastwood into an international superstar. *A Fistful of Dollars* reworks Akira Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* in the Wild West, with Eastwood's amoral Man with No Name playing two gangs off against each other. The more tragic *For a Few Dollars More* pairs Eastwood with Lee Van Cleef in a tale of two bounty hunters in pursuit of the same man but for very different reasons. Finally, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* tells the epic story of three men competing with each other in pursuit of buried gold.

Mark Craven: Disappointingly this trio of AVC 2.35:1 1080p encodes manage to run the gamut from the good to the bad and the ugly. *A Fistful of Dollars* looks every bit the \$200,000 production; with a grainy image that sports a curiously pale (but not necessarily displeasing) contrast range. However, compared to other versions of the film, the image on the Blu-ray is zoomed in slightly, cropping some picture information.

Best of the bunch is *For a Few Dollars More*, which serves up a more robust colour palette and improved fine texture reproduction. A fine layer of grain throughout ensures that the hi-def visuals maintain a filmic look.

Sadly, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* is the version previously released individually in the US – and as such it's been DNR'd to within an inch of its life. Even those usually unaffected by the process will be amazed by the waxy visuals the disc serves up, with almost all grain removed.

Steve May: This classic spaghetti trio offers a choice of DTS HD MA 5.1 or two-channel mono Dolby Digital audio tracks. The surround re-mix on all three movies may be subtle, but the resolution of the lossless mix emphasises the limitations of the trilogy's dusty dialogue tracks. Occasionally gunfire erupts from around the soundstage, and there's quite a wide L/C/R presentation, however I prefer the mono mix on all three releases. The assets generally sound better integrated, the dialogue is certainly easier to listen to and the odd directional effects don't jar. Whatever way you cut it, these are not technically great sounding discs, but their charm is undeniable.

Anton van Beek: The majority of the supplementary material in this three-disc set is culled from the old Special Edition DVDs. But that's no bad thing, as the amount of material is simply staggering, combining audio commentaries, retrospective documentaries, interviews, trailers, TV and radio spots, deleted scenes and a whole lot more.

Intriguingly, the first two films also feature brand-new hi-def featurettes dubbed *The Fraying Archives* – where scholar and Leone expert Sir Christopher Fraying guides viewers through his personal collection of promotional material for the films. The fact that *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* doesn't, and has a slightly different menu structure, is further proof that the disc is simply the single-disc version prepared for the US last year, rather than a new version created specifically for this boxset.

Spaghetti junction: Here's hoping this good, but flawed, boxset opens the floodgates for Sergio Leone Blu-ray releases in the UK



HCC VERDICT

The Spaghetti Western Trilogy → MGM/20th Century Fox → All-region BD → £45 Approx

We say: Many picture problems abound with this otherwise impressive Blu-ray pack

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Sci-fi spin-off manages to transcend its influences and thrill in HD

Stargate Universe: The Complete First Season

represents a major shift in style for the popular TV sci-fi franchise. If the concept feels a little like the bastard offspring of the revamped *Battlestar Galactica* and *Star Trek Voyager* – the new *Stargate* team find themselves trapped at the far side of the universe on an ancient alien spacecraft – the execution eventually makes it work. While the first third of the season feels pretty clichéd, things quickly pick up as the show starts to forge its own path, building towards a superb season finale.

Mark Craven: This first season of *SGU* is yet more proof of just how great big budget TV shows can look in hi-def. Each of the 20 episodes receives a sumptuous AVC 1.78:1 1080p encode that delivers plenty of detail and copes extremely well with the shifting palette employed across the various stories. If there are any flaws, they clearly lie with the source material – such as the odd softer shot.

Steve May: Reflecting the shaky-cam cinema vérité of the visuals, scenes often consist of just dialogue and ambient ship-noise with the occasional gate-pool whoosh. This conspires to make good, if sometimes subtle use, of the surround field (the set is DTS HD MA 5.1). Dialogue clarity and dynamics are excellent. This more considered artistic approach gives each episode a crafted, bespoke feel that is quite different from regular episodic TV fare.

Anton van Beek: This boxset brings together a reasonable batch of extra features for a TV series. Each and every episode is accompanied

by an audio commentary featuring members of the cast and crew. Those featuring the latter tend to be rather more interesting, as the cast offerings are pretty light-hearted affairs that provide little insight into the show beyond the odd amusing anecdote.

Each disc in the set also includes Destiny Star Map and Logs and Kino Video Diaries. The first are hubs providing various mini-featurettes ranging from an overview of the *Stargate* mythos to a look at the making of specific visual effects. The second are a series of in-character shorts that add little to the show. The final disc also features a fairly entertaining set-top game, *SGU: Survival Instinct*.



The Blue Peter garden, v2.0

HCC VERDICT

Stargate Universe → 20th Century Fox → Region A/B
Blu-ray → £68 Approx

We say: Slightly derivative, but promising, *SG-1* spin-off is an entertaining hi-def experience

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Curb Your Enthusiasm: S7

HBO Video → Region 2 DVD
£25 Approx

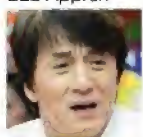


It may be into its seventh year, but HBO's postmodern sitcom shows no sign of flagging – indeed, these 10 episodes see writer/producer/star Larry David at the top of his game, weaving painfully funny scenarios and bang-on observations into a season-long arc about the reunion of the hit series *Seinfeld*. The 1.78:1 picture quality is solid and the stereo audio is functional, but the extras are a treat for fans – four featurettes exploring the *Seinfeld*/*Curb* legacy with input from David, Jerry Seinfeld and Jason Alexander. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

Robin-B-Hood

Cine Asia → All-region BD
£25 Approx



In an interview on the disc, Jackie Chan claims he went back to making films in Asia because, unlike in Hollywood, he's allowed to try different things and prove himself as an actor over there. An odd statement to make with regards to this return to the '80s and '90s Hong Kong comedies that much made his name? Saying that, *Robin-B-Hood* is more fun than most of Chan's recent films. It also looks superb in hi-def courtesy of a marvellous AVC 1.78:1 1080p encode, while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio (in either Cantonese or English) sounds good and punchy. Extras include a trio of interviews. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Bad Boys

Sony Pictures → All-region BD
£18 Approx



While *Bad Boys* is more enjoyable (and shorter) than most of director Michael Bay's subsequent work, it's still a triumph of technique rather than narrative, hoping to salvage its flimsy plot through an abundance of visual pizzazz and ruddy great explosions. All of which makes it a winner on Blu-ray, in the AV stakes at least. The AVC 1.78:1 imagery captures Bay's trademark yellow-tinted visuals perfectly, while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is full of gunshots pinging around the soundstage and deep bass rumbles as stuff explodes on screen. Extras are slightly cut down from earlier Collector's Edition DVD. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

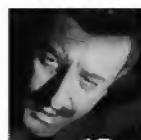
The Karate Kid

Sony Pictures → All-region BD
£20 Approx



Those of you wanting to indulge in a little '80s nostalgia could do worse than check out Sony Pictures' new Blu-ray release of this fun teen take on *Rocky* (both were directed by John G. Avildsen). Okay, so the quality of the AVC 1.78:1 1080p encode isn't exactly breathtaking, but this disc is simply making the best of the somewhat dull and flat source material. Similarly, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio is pretty limited, but crowd scenes do give the mix a little more to work with. A fan-pleasing collection of extras includes a new 'Blu-Pop' pop-up trivia and interview viewing mode, plus commentary. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

Dr. StrangeloveSony Pictures → All-region BD
£18 Approx

One of the more notable absentees from Kubrick's body of work on Blu-ray has finally

materialised, and it was definitely worth the wait. With improved contrast and detailing, plus plenty of grain, the AVC 1.66:1 encode is the best looking version of Kubrick's satirical masterpiece that this reviewer has seen. The new Dolby TrueHD 5.1 mix adds some subtle rear audio to the film, but despite its lossy nature, the DD2.0 dual-mono mix is the preferable option due to its authenticity. Extras include a new Picture-in-Picture track mixing interviews with pop-up trivia and BD-Live link. **AvB**

**The African Queen**ITV Studios → Region B BD
£20 Approx

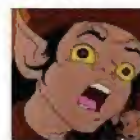
This classic of Hollywood's Golden Age remains as refreshing and exciting a piece of

cinema as you could imagine, which is why it's been such a delight to get the chance to revisit it in high-definition. This Special Restoration Edition Blu-ray's sumptuous AVC 1.33:1 1080p encode is a real revelation returning the lustre and depth to the Jack Cardiff's vibrant cinematography. Audio is also improved a notch or two thanks to a cleaned up LPCM 2.0 dual-mono presentation. One extra takes the form of a new 59min documentary. **AvB**

**Doctor Zhivago**Warner Home Video
All-region BD/R2 → DVD £18 Approx

There is probably no filmmaker more closely associated with the term 'Hollywood epic' than

David Lean, the man responsible for *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Bridge on the River Kwai*. Surprisingly, though, while some of his older and more intimate films like *Brief Encounter* have made it to Blu-ray in the past, *Doctor Zhivago* is the first of his true epics to hit the format. Thankfully, Warner has done another tremendous job restoring this 45 year-old film to its original glory and serving up an impressive VC-1 2.35:1 1080p encode accompanied by a subtle DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack. **AvB**

**Wizards**Eureka → All-region BD
£18 Approx

A must-have for any serious animation connoisseur, this Blu-ray outing for Ralph Bakshi's

fascinating 1977 post-apocalyptic sci-fi/fantasy hybrid/anti-war parable (delete as appropriate) is a love letter to both the film and the man who made it. The lovingly restored AVC 1.78:1 encode still shows some print damage, but is still the best the film has looked in decades and really highlights the quality of the animation and static art used throughout. And while the DTS-HD MA 2.0 mix is rather limited, it still makes the most of Andrew Belling's memorable score. Magic! **AvB**



Charles in charge

Comedy genius' classic movies now look better than ever before

The Kid and The Great Dictator

are both notable firsts for the legendary comic actor Charlie Chaplin. The former, a somewhat schmaltzy but extremely funny tale about Chaplin's iconic Little Tramp finding an abandoned baby, was his first full-length silent feature film. The second, a self-financed story that lampooned Hitler and was produced as clear defiance of Nazism (made a year before the US entered World War II), was his first talking feature. Both remain audacious and vibrant comedies that remain as thrilling and funny as ever.

Mark Craven: While neither of these releases will ever be mistaken for the cutting-edge of Blu-ray picture quality, both AVC 1.33:1 1080p encodes represent such a serious improvement on all previous incarnations that Chaplin fans should consider them both an essential purchase. This isn't to say that both are free from problems – there's some print damage in evidence, accurate cropping/framing remains an issue and slight artefacting occasionally rears its head. That said, contrast is spot-on and images are wonderfully film-like.

Steve May: I was tempted to do an exaggerated double take when I discovered that both these Chaplin classics come with DTS HS MA 5.1 sound options. It seems an unlikely marriage. The earlier of the two films, *The Kid*, has a lushly orchestrated, often jaunty score written by Chaplin himself in 1971, to accompany the film's theatrical reissue. In reality, it's a wide-mono, not really stereophonic

accompaniment to the movie that preceded it by fifty years. *The Great Dictator* is rather different. The original soundtrack for this 1940 release is presented in both dual-mono DD or DTS HD MA. The latter isn't a surround remix – instead the deeper bit-bucket is used to improve clarity – with considerable success. The vintage track is astoundingly clean and clear.

Anton van Beek: Surprisingly, these Blu-ray releases are devoid of extra features. Instead, each comes bundled with a DVD copy of the film that also contains a cut-down selection of extras that previously surfaced on Warner/MK2's 2003 *The Chaplin Collection* DVD releases.

For *The Kid* there's an intro by Chaplin biographer David Robinson, a documentary, deleted scenes, plus archival and home movie footage. *The Great Dictator* fares similarly with just some colour behind-the-scenes material, a documentary and a 1919 silent Chaplin short on offer. Both contain the same 10min 'showreel' of clips from a selection of Chaplin's films.

**HCC VERDICT**

The Kid/The Great Dictator → Park Circus → Region B BD/R2 DVD → £20 Each

We say: Reduced extras smart, but these Blu-rays are sure to delight the Tramp's many fans

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Steady on, Chap: Comic's Nazi satire courted controversy



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freesat HD Freeview HD

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TX-PS0VT20

TX-P65VT20

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PROJECTORS

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OPTOMA

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PANASONIC

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DMP-BD45

DMP-BD65

DMP-BD85

PIONEER

Get the most out of your movies with Pioneer's luxuriously designed BDP-330 and top-of-the-range BDP-LX53. Both models feature network functionality including YouTube browsing and RSS feeds.



BDP-330

BDP-LX53

DENON

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DBP-1611UD

DBP-2011UD

SONY

Experience movies like never before. These new Blu-ray disc players let you watch your favourite movie moments in true full high definition with superior high resolution surround sound. Models include the 2D BDP-S370 and 3D ready BDP-S470 and BDP-S570.



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BDP-S570

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AVR-1911
AVR-2311

AVR-3311
AVR-4311



ONKYO

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TX-SR608

TX-NR708

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RADIUS



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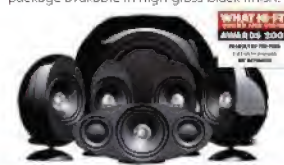


YSP-4100

YSP-5100

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ONKYO	TX-SR608	£449
PIONEER	VSX-920	£499
PIONEER	SC-LX82	£ SSAV.COM
YAMAHA	RX-V567	£399

AV SPEAKERS

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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Want to comment on current technology? Need to share? **HCC** is here to help

Can I mix and match?

A couple of points about 3D that have occurred to me and I can't recall having seen answered anywhere else. I like Sony disc players but prefer Panasonic TVs – will the two companies' 3D systems be compatible or will we be condemned to matching components? Also, will older 3D movies that use the red and green glasses be viewable through the new systems? *John Rankine, via email*

There's no reason why different brands' 3D hardware shouldn't be compatible – just don't try to mix different companies' active shutter glasses. As for anaglyph 3D films – these should play back fine on a 3D deck, but you'll still only get the outdated anaglyph effect, and you'll need those cardboard glasses. An interesting experiment would be to see whether 2D-3D conversion (as found on Samsung's 3D screens) creates a better 3D effect with an anaglyph film than the red/green specs themselves are capable of.

Classic films need care and attention

In response to The Beek's column in HCC #183, I am an avid fan of classic movies on Blu-ray, but they must be fully restored, like the superb *How the West Was Won*. Two films I would love to see are *The Big Country* and *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. *Colin Wright, via email*

While there has been no word on a Blu-ray release of *The Bridge on the River Kwai* yet, expectations are high that the film will see release in the next



Samsung's BD deck will still play anaglyph titles

couple of years. Sony Pictures has been talking about a hi-def release of David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* for a while now, and we expect that title to arrive in 2012 to coincide with the film's 50th anniversary. The same studio also holds the rights to *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, and we'd be very surprised if work hadn't been undertaken on that title as well for a release around the same time,

or possibly in the run-up to *Lawrence...*'s Blu-ray debut. Sadly, things don't look too bright for *The Big Country* at the moment, as the rights to that particular film lie with the struggling MGM, whose commitment to Blu-ray is currently patchy at best in the UK due to the studio's uncertain future.

Will my plasma die?

Hope you can put my mind at rest. I keep reading about black

levels rising on Panasonic plasmas. Without mentioning forum names, what I have read seems to be on US models. Will my UK Panasonic TH-50PZ800 have problems in the future? Will it still have good blacks on the TV a year and half on? Am I getting paranoid? I just read your review of the Panasonic TX-P50VT20B, which I am interested in buying and am concerned. I have seen this TV and it is indeed outstanding. *Philip Bowers, via email*

Star Letter

Shall I dump my PVR?

Hi. Having just read John Archer's review of the Panasonic TX-P50G20 I have a quick question which I am hoping he might kindly advise me on.

When describing the USB HDD recording setup as "frustrating" were you referring to being forced to use a particular product and the lack of portability or the actual use of the system itself once setup? (I've read somewhere that the live rewind is hit and miss).

I ask because I've just put £300 into a 500GB Humax Foxsat HD PVR and will return it if this system is any good. (TV I'm looking at is actually the TX-L32D25). I can live with

a fiddly install and being tied to the Buffalo HDD if it performs well once setup. Any help on this matter would be hugely appreciated. *Jon Bright, via email*

John says: I was talking about the limitations of being forced to buy such a specific product and lack of portability rather than the actual experience of making recordings.

The recordings themselves are good quality, and the trickplay features available seemed stable enough during my tests – but this was only a period of a week or so.

The system isn't as slick or flexible as a dedicated recording device would be, though, as you'd expect. Bear in mind, for instance, that you



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We've seen some forum chatter about black levels rising (ie contrast dropping) on Panasonic plasmas, mainly originating from the USA, but we don't have any documented examples from the UK.

This isn't to say it might not happen; plasma screens do have a quoted life expectancy. This might have been around 30,000 hours of use for sets made a couple of years ago. But more current sets often quote life expectancies of around 100,000 hours, so if you buy a new plasma set today, it may well last longer than you do.

Which deck for me?

Hi, I'm thinking of the Sony BDP-373 or the Samsung

won't be able to record one digital programme while watching another, or be able to rely on features like Series Link. In other words, while the USB recording is fine for casual recording and 'instant pausing', if you generally record a lot of stuff you might still want to look at an external option.

Hope this helps you in some way!

Winner: Star Letter-writer Jon Bright wins a copy of *Clash of the Titans* on Blu-ray. This sword and sandal blockbuster starring Sam Worthington is available to buy from July 26th on Blu-ray, DVD, On-Demand and Digital Download courtesy of Warner Home Video.

BD-C5300 Blu-ray player, both of which have the new internet TV services. My TV is a Samsung 37in 1080p model. I can buy the Sony from my Sony Centre with trade-in with my old VCR for £120. The Samsung I have seen on Blockbuster with six Blu-ray discs for £130. The price doesn't matter but which would go best with the TV and my Pioneer surround system?
Rob, via email

The Sony BDP-S373 is a Sony Centre exclusive version of the BDP-S370, which has emerged triumphant from our BD player group test this issue (see page 86). The Samsung is the brand's entry-level model, and we haven't looked at it yet, but we have seen the step-up BD-C6500 (again in the group test) and noticed a few AV foibles. It may be a better aesthetic match to your TV, and six Blu-ray discs sounds tempting, but in pure AV terms we'd advise you check out the Sony player first.

HD is going soft

While I am pleased, as a Sky HD subscriber, that the number of high-definition services is being increased, I am not impressed by the huge variation in image quality and definition between the channels. On some HD programs the picture is breathtaking in its detail and clarity; on others it appears no better than an SD one, quite at random, it seems. Is this down to the satellite, my equipment or what?
Terry, via e-mail

Probably neither. The definition in a broadcast HD picture depends on many factors; the

fact that you have seen good quality pictures exonerates your receiver and screen. One factor is the bit-rate/bandwidth of the transmission channel: BBC HD cut theirs by 20% last summer. More common are shortcomings due to the original material being up-converted from a mediocre copy. Astra, the satellite operator, has appealed to broadcasters to improve their HD images in order to avoid complaints from viewers.

What the Hel?

Just thought I'd point out that on page 105 of the magazine (HCC #183) you had a mistake. In the picture caption for the review of *Bitch Slap*, you say that 'Mel shows off her deadly weapons'. The character's name is Hel, not Mel.
LB, via email

That is incredibly well-spotted LB. Although, in our defence, the M and H keys are quite close together on our keyboard.

Screen clean

I found that my LCD TV screen was a bit grubby and dusty, so I cleaned it myself. Now I am concerned to find that the picture has dark and light shading on it when lit up, a bit like a cloudy sky. I haven't wrecked it, have I?
Peter Longhurst, via e-mail

Hopefully the screen will recover from what was probably excessive pressure during your cleaning operation. This is known as a mura defect, in which the liquid crystals become compressed or unevenly distributed. Generally time cures this one, with normal use of the screen and the temperature cycling – both internal and ambient – which that involves. We've found that gentle and even massaging of the surface with a micro-fibre cloth can help with this, too ●

Write to Letters, Home Cinema Choice, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW, or email us at hcc@futurenet.co.uk. Due to the volume of letters we receive we cannot guarantee to print/answer them all.

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How we test

Home Cinema Choice's hardware reviews combine the subjective opinion of our seasoned reviewers with hard technical data.

Chris Jenkins explains how the HCC Tech Labs work

HCC reviews tend to be a mixture of subjective opinion and objective data. While we value the subjective opinions of our highly experienced reviews team, we like to blend and balance their opinions with objective measurements. The HCC Tech Labs have been measuring AV equipment for nearly 20 years. It was originally conceived to evaluate the performance of VCRs and CRT TVs, and it is now routinely testing Blu-ray players and HD displays.

Interestingly, much of our first generation hardware is still in use (we maintain an irrational fondness for an oscilloscope used to determine the onset of clipping on amplifiers), although our more venerable hardware is now supplemented by new software and measurement methodologies. One thing remains unchanged though: our commitment to supply you with the best possible buying advice.

Virtual Tour

Our Tech Labs consist of two main facilities: a Viewing Room, and a Test Lab.

The Viewing Room is used mainly for testing TVs, projectors and speakers and has been designed to reproduce the conditions that are found in a typical mid-range home cinema setup. It was created by award-winning custom installers Pounds (www.poundstv.co.uk), and is completely light-proofed. While it is not designed to be sound-proof, it has been skinned in Acoustiblock and has been acoustically treated and tuned by the experts at RPG (www.rpg-europe.co.uk), using custom absorbers and diffusers. The room features multiple HDMI, component video and audio cable runs, as well as analogue and digital TV and satellite feeds, and has a resident 7.2

speaker system. Multiple screens can be fed the same source material simultaneously, courtesy of a Gefen 2-in-4-out HDMI switcher/splitter, for screen shootouts.

Number crunching

The Test Lab is used mainly for number-crunching DVD/Blu-ray players and amplifiers. It's equipped with two industry-standard systems: a Tektronix VM700 video data analyser, and an Audio Precision APX585 multichannel audio analyser. Using standard test signals from discs and signal generators, these two systems are used to measure factors such as audio and video signal jitter, frequency response and output power. These give us a good general idea of the component quality, processing power and overall performance of players and amplifiers.

Professionals at large

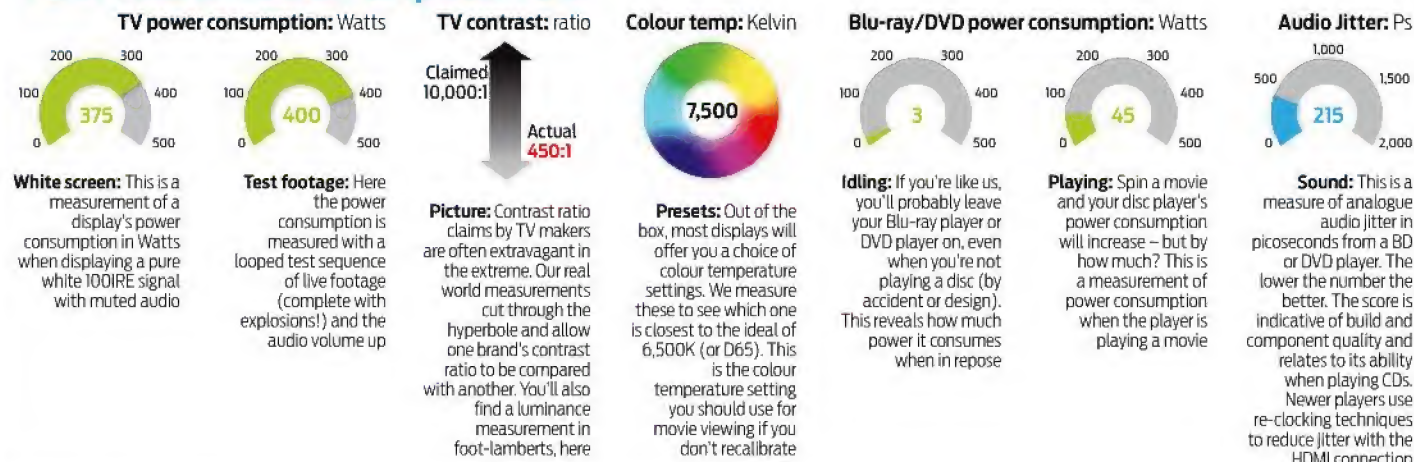
Over the years, our testers have been trained in calibration and testing techniques by the ISF, Tektronix, the Home Acoustics Alliance and other industry bodies. In short, when you read a review in HCC, you can be sure that the reviewer's subjective opinion is backed up by objective scientific lab testing.

Understandable and useful

One of our pledges is to present information that is both understandable and useful, for example, exposing the hype perpetrated by some makers of plasmas and LCD TVs regarding contrast ratios. To determine real world contrast, as well as measuring colour temperature presets, we employ a Sencore VP401 signal generator alongside a PC running Datacolor Colorfacts software with a Spyder 2 sensor. We use the Sencore signal generator and our own discs to generate standard TV



Tech Lab tests explained



**Test bench:**

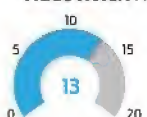
Equipment from the likes of Snell & Wilcox, and Tektronix allows us to compare all manner of kit

signals. Colorfacts analyses the colour and luminance performance of TVs and projectors, giving us information in areas such as contrast ratio, colour temperature and luminance.

Playback

Increasingly, you've been asking for more information on power consumption, and so we've now moved these

results to a headline position on our tests. We've also developed a more graphical presentation (key below) of some of the data we produce, which should make the facts more relevant and digestible. Not all the data we generate is published (frankly, you'd be bored) but all of it goes into the melting pot of opinion. While one key reviewer is bylined for our tests, as many as four team players will contribute to our findings ●

Video Jitter: Ns

Vision: This is a measure of video jitter in nanoseconds from a BD or DVD player. The lower the number the better. The score is indicative of build and component quality. We also present figures for Chroma Crosstalk (another quality indicator) and frequency response @5.8MHz

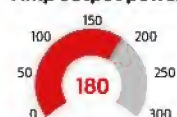
Loading: Boot/Java

Boot speed & tray eject
15s
Tray in to main BD menu
45s

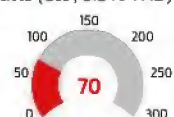
Disc loading & Java: Blu-ray players can be notoriously slow to load and play discs, thanks to the DRM and Java content of BD software. These timings are crucial to the user experience – naturally faster is best

AVR power: Watts

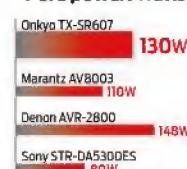
Powered: When you fire up that big AV receiver to watch a new movie you may be surprised to learn just how much current it's drawing. This is one of two measurements we take for AV amp power consumption. The other is when the AVR is powered up but idle

Amp output power: Watts (8Ω, 0.5% THD)

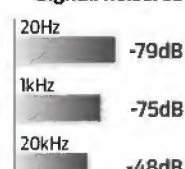
2-channel 8Ω: So just how heroic is that AVR you've been saving for? Putting aside paper claims, we measure its output in two-channel stereo mode. Also noted here is a figure for Total Harmonic Distortion



5-channel 8Ω: In most cases, an amplifier's muscle will be diminished when it runs in multichannel mode. We push the product to extremes in a 5.1 configuration to see how much grunt is available with all channels driven

Pure power: Watts

Fidelity firewall: This is our measurement of power untainted by distortion (typically 0.052THD, 8Ω, 1kHz). It's an indicator of both power output and component quality

Signal/noise: dB

S/N tests: These amp measurements reveal the ratio of noise to signal at a specific frequency. Readings taken at low, mid and high points help determine imaging clarity and sonic character

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Don't touch it	1 2 3 4 5

LCD TV

Best on test...



SONY
46in → KDL-40EX503
£900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

LCD with built-in Freeview HD tuner and Bravia Internet Video

Highs: Free HD channels on tap; value for money; 'net interactivity'

Lows: CCFL backlight

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 181
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk



PHILIPS
46in → 46PFL9704
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Second-gen LED backlit LCD improves on its predecessor

Highs: Excellent control over local dimming; Net TV functionality; gorgeous finish

Lows: Premium price tag

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 5
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.philips.co.uk



SAMSUNG
40in → UE-40C7000
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Debut 3DTV stands out in other areas, too

Highs: Next-gen tech; Freeview HD tuner; app store

Lows: Fiddly control system; 3D effect needs a bigger display

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Via HDMI only
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



LG
42in → 42SL9000
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

LG's LED-lit 'Seamless' LCD offers excellent value for money

Highs: Exceptional pictures; ISF-certified calibrated controls

Lows: Black levels aren't A-list; 'Seamless' design isn't all that

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



SHARP
46in → LC-46LE821E
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Quad Pixel edge-lit LED TV with innovative in-built Flash PVR

Highs: Amazing levels of fine detail; great colour fidelity; useful Time Shift function

Lows: No video streaming

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 1 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.sharp.co.uk

Also Recommended...



JVC
32in → LT-32WX50
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Installer-friendly 32in monitor with a wide colour gamut

Highs: Jaw-dropping ultra-slim design; terrific colour response and still image playback

Lows: Backlight inconsistencies

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 2
No. of Scart inputs: 0
No. of component inputs: Via D-Sub adaptor
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: No

Tested: Issue 181
For more info visit:
www.jvc.co.uk



SAMSUNG
32in → LE40B650
£700 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Look for good deals on this 2009-issue 40in LCD

Highs: Superb features; excellent all-round pics; design

Lows: Audio performance is pretty pathetic

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



TOSHIBA
46in → 46SV685DB
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Debut LED-backlit screen from Tosh is a real eye-opener

Highs: Excellent contrast and detail; good quality audio; multimedia talents

Lows: Not particularly stylish

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.toshiba.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

PHILIPS
56in → Cinema 21:9
£4,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Philips' groundbreaking ultra widescreen TV needs to be seen to be believed. It's deceptively large (about as wide as a traditional 65in TV) and genuinely brings a sense of cinema to your 2.35:1 movies. Expanded 16:9 material is surprisingly watchable, too. There are other frills here – Ambilight, 200Hz processing, five HDMI inputs, Net TV and DLNA certification – but it's the forward-thinking design and technology of the 21:9 that will blow you away. We expect to see a 3D version launched later this year.

Tested: Issue 171
For more info visit: www.philips.co.uk



→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
2560 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 5
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Plasma TV

Best on test...



PIONEER
60in → KRP-600A
£5,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Kuro with separate media box, Ethernet and satellite tuner

Highs: Awesome black levels; colour accuracy; slim panel; media-savvy

Lows: Problems with AVI files

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 3 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes and DVB-S2 tuner

Tested: Issue 164
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



PANASONIC
65in → TX-P65V10B
£4,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Currently the biggest, bestest plasma you can buy

Highs: High-impact bigscreen pictures; Freesat HD

Lows: Lack of manual colour temp controls; sucks electricity

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



PANASONIC
46in → TX-P46Z1
£4,300 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

THX-certified, ultrathin PDP with wireless transmission

Highs: Stunning HD and SD pictures; gorgeous design; good features set

Lows: Premium price point

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 172
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



PANASONIC
50in → TX-P50G20
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Freeview HD and Freesat HD plasma is the FTA king

Highs: Performance; price; Freesat/Freeview HD tuners;

Lows: USB recording mode comes with strings attached

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes, Freeview HD and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



LG
32in → 32PG6000
£500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

World's smallest 32in plasma challenges LCD rivals

Highs: Smooth movement; good blacks and connectivity

Lows: Lack of detail; some jagged edges; average audio

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1024 x 720 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 162
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk

Also Recommended...



LG
50in → 50PG6000
£1,100 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Superb HD Ready plasma offering great value for money

Highs: Extensive calibration possibilities; excellent black level; sexy bezel

Lows: Not Full HD

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1366 x 768 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 154
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



PANASONIC
42in → TX-P42G15
£850 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Freesat HD NeoPDP at an enticing price

Highs: Wide viewing angle; excellent HD pics

Lows: Lacks brightness; three HDMI's only

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes and Freesat HD

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



SAMSUNG
50in → PS50A556
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Bargain-priced monster screen with a few caveats

Highs: Superb specification; great build quality; sharp detail

Lows: Some motion artefacts and noise visible

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 161
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
50in → TX-P50YT20
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

The arrival of Panasonic's first 3DTV was always going to get the AV juices running, and this 50in plasma doesn't disappoint – 3D Blu-ray material comes over sharp and smooth with no visible crosstalk, while Sky's half-resolution 3D preview channel is revelatory, with sports coverage in particular showing excellent depth and detail. Other highlights of this surprisingly affordable 3D set include the two pairs of supplied eyewear, class-leading 2D hi-def picture performance, and savvy networking skills.

Tested: Issue 183
For more info visit: www.panasonic.co.uk

→ Specifications

HD Ready: yes (up to 1080p)
Native resolution: 1,920 x 1,080
No. of HDMI inputs: 4 (v1.4)
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Freeview HD and Freesat HD

Blu-ray Players

Best on test...



DENON
Blu-ray → DVD-A1UD
£4,500 Approx



Reference universal Blu-ray player that sets new standards

Highs: Stunning life-like picture; genuine hi-fi sound; awesome DVD upscaling
Lows: Complex to set up; not for those on a budget!

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: Yes/Yes
Networkability: Ethernet

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.denon.co.uk



SAMSUNG
Blu-ray → BD-C6900
£350 Approx



Early adopters will love this 3D Blu-ray player

Highs: 3D compatibility; video quality; USB file support
Lows: v1.4 HDMI output means hookup to older AVRs will be via 7.1 outputs

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi; USB

Tested: Issue 181
For more info visit:
www.samsung.co.uk



LG
Blu-ray → BD390
£290 Approx



Improved players sports more features than BD370

Highs: Excellent performance; 1GB internal storage; Wi-Fi net connection; 7.1 analogue outputs
Lows: Audio can't match its premium BD rivals

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi; USB

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



PANASONIC
Blu-ray → DMP-BD85
£300 Approx



New top-of-the line deck – until the 3D player arrives...

Highs: Overall picture and sound performance; 'Tube' sound emulator for CDs
Lows: Somewhat sluggish menus; Wi-Fi via dongle only

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi via dongle; SD card slot; 2 x USB

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



PANASONIC
Blu-ray → DMP-BDT300
£400 Approx



3D BD deck to work in tandem with the brand's 3D plasmas

Highs: Solid AV performance; 3D material is sharp, smooth and involving; twin HDMI outputs
Lows: Wi-Fi is by dongle only

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet; optional Wi-Fi dongle; USB; SD slot

Tested: Issue 183
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

SONY
Blu-ray → BDP-S760 → £380 Approx



Sony has a few Blu-ray decks now that are comfortably better than its PlayStation 3 console, and the keenly-priced S760 is our favourite. It incorporates the HD Reality Enhancer and Super Bit-Mapping picture-processing tech of its £1,200 BDP-S5000ES stablemate (albeit in a thinner chassis) and the results are startling – detailed, deep, colour-rich HD visuals and quality surround sound delivery. Some might miss the lack of esoteric codec support (no MKV here, folks) but that's not what this Sony is about – consider it a reference machine for the budget-conscious.

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit: www.sony.co.uk

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet; Wi-Fi; USB

Also Recommended



PIONEER
Blu-ray → BDP-LX52
£500 Approx



Stripped-down LX-branded player is a mid-range marvel

Highs: Class-leading picture and sound
Lows: Not simple to get to grips with; multichannel PQLS function only works on LPCM

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: Ethernet; USB

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



PHILIPS
Blu-ray → BDP7300
£230 Approx



Debut UK deck from Philips was worth the wait

Highs: Internal 1GB storage; multichannel analogue outputs; vivid, detailed image
Lows: Stylised 'curved' look not for everyone

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (5.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet; USB

Tested: Issue 175
For more info visit:
www.philips.co.uk



ANTHEM
Blu-ray → BLX 200
£600 Approx



Debut deck from the Canadian brand eschews features to major on performance

Highs: Picture quality; hi-fi audio; robust build quality
Lows: Lack of multimedia services; no 7.1 line outs

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet for BD-Live

Tested: Issue 183
For more info visit:
www.anthemavs.co.uk

Recorders

Best on test...



SONY
DVDR → RDR-HXD995
£250 Approx



Heavyweight Freeview+ unit with features galore

Highs: Excellent AV performance; flexible recording modes; multimedia prowess

Lows: Records 'interactive red dot'; possible aerial sensitivity

→ Specifications

HDD size: 250GB
Twin tuners: Yes, digital and analogue
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 165
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk



HUMAX
Freesat PVR → Foxsat HDR
£300 Approx



First Freesat HD PVR brings extra clout to fledgling system

Highs: Cinch to operate; good performance; ITV in HD; JPEG/MP3 playback

Lows: Annoying LCD; slow to boot up; needs more HD content!

→ Specifications

HDD size: 320GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freesat HD (satellite – requires dish)
HDMI: Yes
Component output: No

Tested: Issue 165
For more info visit:
www.humaxdigital.com/uk



SAGEM
PVR → DTR67500T
£180 Approx



500GB Freeview+ PVR with USB archiving

Highs: Large HDD; flexible and intuitive EPG; picture quality is excellent

Lows: No way of importing recordings from other devices

→ Specifications

HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.sagem.com/uk



LG
DVDR/3.1 → HRT403DA
£500 Approx



Convergence king offers 3.1 audio and HDD/DVD recording

Highs: Acceptable, punchy audio; well-specified recorder; quality DVD pictures

Lows: Lacks DTS support; no 5.1 upgrade path

→ Specifications

HDD size: 160GB
Twin tuners: Yes, digital and analogue
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 165
For more info visit:
www.lge.com/uk



GRUNDIG
Freesat PVR → GUFSDTR500HD
£280 Approx



Dual-tuner Freesat+ PVR with capacious 500GB HDD

Highs: Easy to use; cool-running; efficient upscaling of non-HD channels

Lows: USB port is disabled

→ Specifications

HDD size: 500GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freesat HD
HDMI: Yes
Component output: No

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.topfield.co.uk

Also recommended



PIONEER
DVDR → DVR-560HX
£400 Approx



Full PC-linked multimedia jukebox and DVD/HDD unit

Highs: Excellent AV performance and features spread; networkability

Lows: Jukebox abilities reliant on Windows Media Player

→ Specifications

HDD size: 160GB
Twin tuners: Yes, digital & analogue
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: Yes
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 159
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



PANASONIC
DVDR → DMR-EX773
£300 Approx



DVD/HDD recorder that misses out on Freeview HD

Highs: Solid AV performance; heaps of features and recording flexibility

Lows: No infra-red control over STB; single Freeview tuner only

→ Specifications

HDD size: 160GB
Twin tuners: No, 1 x digital only
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes
Camcorder input: No – USB/SD via USB instead
Format: -R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk



HUMAX
PVR → PVR-9300T
£200 Approx



Souped-up Humax drops USB socket but boosts HDD capacity

Highs: Easy and responsive to use; fine AV performance; well-featured

Lows: Limited HDMI modes; no USB functionality

→ Specifications

HDD size: 320GB
Twin tuners: Yes, Freeview
HDMI: Yes
Component output: Yes

Tested: Issue 162
For more info visit:
www.humaxdigital.com/uk

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
DVD/BDR → DMR-BS850 → £1,000 Approx



With its 500GB HDD, twin Freesat HD tuners, profile 2.0 Blu-ray player/recorder and Viera Cast online interactivity, this Panasonic deck is clearly the king of convergence. As a BD-spinner it's solid, sharing the gizzards of the brand's DMP-BD60, and as a PVR it's simply brilliant, with the mix of hard disc and Blu-ray drive allowing for all sorts of archiving and editing possibilities. The USB, firewire and SD inputs – and in-built Gracenote database – add even more flexibility.

Tested: Issue 170
For more info visit: www.panasonic.co.uk

→ Specifications

Hard disk: 500GB
Twin Tuners: Yes 2 x Freesat HD
Component output: Yes (progressive)
Freeview+: No, it's Freesat
Format: BD-RE, BD-R, DVD-R/RW, +R/RW, -RAM
Dual-layer recording: Yes

AV Receivers

Best on test...



NAD
Amp/Processor
M25/M15HD
£6,600 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Classy heavyweight combo

Highs: Innovative modular design; excellent performance
Lows: No XLR jacks

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 130W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 183
For more info visit:
nadelectronics.com



YAMAHA
AVR → RX-V2065
£850 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

New-look Yamaha receiver is a great sub-£1K all-rounder

Highs: Superb networking prowess; wonderful natural sound that suits all material
Lows: GUI takes some getting used to

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 130W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 2
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.yamaha.co.uk



ONKYO
AVR → TX-NR5007
£2,200 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

9.2-channel HD receiver with exhaustive features and power

Highs: First-class home cinema performance; processing allows 9-channel height/width audio
Lows: No proprietary anti-jitter tech, Wi-Fi or secondary remote

→ Specifications

Power: 9 x 220W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Yes, Ultra2 Plus
Component input: 3
HDMI: 8-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.eu.onkyo.com



ONKYO
Amp/Processor
PR-SC5500/PA-MC5500
£3,600 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Onkyo's separates system delivers on all AV fronts

Highs: Massive power reserves; Smooth AV performance
Lows: Sizeable and weighty

→ Specifications

Power: 9 x 220W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (FM/AM/net)
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Ultra2
Component input: 3
HDMI: 8-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.eu.onkyo.com



SONY
AVR → STR-DH800
£350 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Slick, flexible bargain model with provision for wireless multiroom audio

Highs: Superb value; big and smooth sound; easy to use
Lows: No video upscaling or multichannel inputs

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 85W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: No
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: No, unless you use S-Air wireless speakers
Serial port control: No
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out
Multichannel input: No

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk

Editor's Choice...

DENON
AVR → AVR-4810
£2,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Denon's AVR-4810 is the current king of the new breed of receivers that make all sorts of speaker configurations possible. Thanks to Audyssey DSX and Dolby Pro-Logic IIz processing, it's capable of driving an 11.3-channel system (with the aid of an extra stereo amp), and it'll have you re-arranging your speakers in no time. Beyond this mastery of new formats, the AVR-4810 delivers a rich, powerful sound and a full suite of features from Net radio and integrated Wi-Fi to a wide choice of inputs and four-zone multiroom. Brilliant.

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit: www.denon.co.uk

→ Specifications

Power: 9 x 140W (8Ω)
Upscaling to HDMI: Yes
Tuner: AM/FM/Net
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: Yes/Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3 & 4
Serial port control: Yes, 2
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)



Also Recommended...



NAD
AVR → T747
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Excellent AVR offers more grunt than its specs suggest

Highs: Storming all-round performance; eases you into every film; simple to use
Lows: No Ethernet or USB inputs; DAB costs extra

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 60W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.nadelectronics.com



ONKYO
AVR → TX-NR807
£800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Powerful and potent height/width processor at a great price

Highs: Full-on gung-ho sound with massive bass; DSX/DPLIIz processing; excellent upscaling
Lows: Slightly flimsy build; no USB or multichannel inputs

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 180W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Select2 Plus
Component input: 2
HDMI: 6-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: No

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.eu.onkyo.com



DENON
AVR → AVR-4310
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Audyssey DSX-toting AVR will change the way you think about speaker placement

Highs: Awesome sound as standard; extra width and height channels are a boon
Lows: Lacks the 9.1 DSX option

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 130W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM/net)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.denon.co.uk

Projectors

Best on test...



INFOCUS
DLP → ScreenPlay SP8602
£3,000 Approx



New-look LCD projector from a much-revered brand

Highs: Excellent picture quality; good range of adjustments; different 'skins'
Lows: Not as flexible to set up as some; slightly noisy runner

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 3
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,300 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 5,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,500 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 182
For more info visit:
www.infocus.com



VIVITEK
DLP → H1085
£1,000 Approx



A brilliant Full HD projector at a mouth-watering price

Highs: Rich colours; excellent image tweaks; 12V trigger
Lows: Noisy runner in high brightness mode; some low-level noise in darker scenes

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 2,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 5,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 26dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.vivitekcorp.com



SONY
SXRDX → VPL-VW85
£5,400 Approx



Successor the VW80 delivers a truly cinematic picture

Highs: Astonishing contrast and detail levels; plenty of picture tweaks
Lows: MotionFlow tech is best left unused

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 800 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 120,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 20dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit:
www.sony.co.uk/biz



EPSON
LCD → EH-TW5500
£4,000 Approx



Epson's flagship home cinema projector does LCD proud

Highs: Lots of features; easy and flexible to setup; produces the finest LCD pictures yet
Lows: More expensive than rivals; can lose focus a little

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 200,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 181
For more info visit:
www.epson.co.uk



PANASONIC
LCD → PT-AE4000
£2,500 Approx



Updated flagship PJ adds red-rich lamp and 12V trigger

Highs: Smooth filmic pictures; easy to setup and use; handy feature set
Lows: Boxy design; be careful with high frame-rate settings

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 100,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.panasonic.co.uk

Also Recommended...



BENQ
DLP → W1000
£1,000 Approx



A £1K Full HD projector with good colour presets

Highs: Very sharp HD pictures; alluring tactile finish; plenty of fine-tuning options
Lows: Rainbow effect; noticeable fan noise

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 2,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 3,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 27dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
benq.co.uk



OPTOMA
DLP → HD20
£900 Approx



Wallet-friendly model is an ideal first projector

Highs: Excellent detail resolution; reasonable contrast and brightness
Lows: Some fan noise; rainbow effect; limited throw distance

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,700 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 500:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 29dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.optoma.co.uk



VIVITEK
DLP → H9080FD
£10,000 Approx



The world's first 'lampless' LED projector

Highs: Excellent colour fidelity; great definition; long lifespan
Lows: Lacks brightness; early adopters pay for the innovative LED tech

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: No, use HDMI instead for PC hookup
Brightness (claimed): 1,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 15,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.vivitekcorp.com

Editor's Choice...

JVC
D-ILA → HD950
£6,000 Approx



Put simply, JVC's new video-chucker is capable of an awe-inspiring performance. Spin up a Blu-ray and you'll be rewarded with three-dimensional, natural-looking pictures that are packed with detail, shadow subtlety and vibrant colours. Setting up the HD950 is made easy by its fully-motorised optical adjustments, and a THX-certified colour preset for those not wanting to get their hands dirty in its extensive calibration menus. It's an almost silent runner, too. The best PJ we've yet seen at this price point.

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit: www.jvc.co.uk

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 900 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 50,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 19dB
24fps: Yes

Speaker Systems

Best on test...



BOSTON ACOUSTICS
5.1 → VS Series
£5,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Gorgeous-looking, hi-tech 5.1 system for serious cinema

Highs: Enormous sound; scintillating HF performance
Lows: Subwoofer feels underpowered compared to surrounds

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 2 x 400.3 x 250W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 1 x 500W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 173
For more info visit:
www.bostonacoustics.com



PIONEER
5.1 → EX Series
£11,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A stunning 5.1 system to match the brand's high-quality components

Highs: Breathtaking accuracy; beautiful imagery and detail; sexy design and solid build
Lows: Demands specific room placement

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 160W,
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 250W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf:
Rears (at a stretch...)

Tested: Issue 170
For more info visit:
www.pioneer.co.uk



MONITOR AUDIO
5.1 → Vector
£650 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

5.1 sub/sat system ideal for a small room home cinema

Highs: Easy to wall-mount; rugged build quality; thrilling surround sound performance
Lows: Subwoofer is punchy and fast, but lacks depth

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 80W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 100W
Finish: Matt; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.monitoraudio.com



BOWERS & WILKINS
5.1 → CM Series
£4,250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Top quality 5.1 array in a classical wood finish

Highs: True sweet highs from hi-tech tweeters; brilliant 10in woofer; solid construction
Lows: Square-edge design not exactly high-end

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 3 x 200W, 2 x 120W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 500W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.bowers-wilkins.com



KLIPSCH
5.1 → Icon system
£2,700 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Sleek-looking US-made system with horn technology

Highs: High-quality audio; excellent value for money; clever, simple-to-use subwoofer
Lows: Not suited to large-scale home cinema rooms

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 2 x 125W, 2 x 75W, 1 x 100
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 300W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 180
For more info visit:
www.klipsch.co.uk

Also Recommended...



TEUFEL
5.1 → System 8 THX Ultra2
£2,700 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

5.1 system with THX Ultra2 certification

Highs: Full-fat THX performance at a low-price; huge, potent subwoofer
Lows: Mail-order only means there's no chance to try before you buy

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 3 x 120W, 2 x 80W
Rears: Dipole
Subwoofer: 600W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 181
For more info visit:
www.teufel.eu



WHARFEDALE
5.1 → Diamond 10 HCP
£650 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Sub/sat system mixes hi-fi roots with a 10in woofer

Highs: Powerful subwoofer; exciting treble; highly musical
Lows: A little bright at high volume; might not be visceral enough for action movie fans

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 4 x 75W, 1 x 120W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 150W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 176
For more info visit:
www.wharfedale.co.uk



FOCAL JMLAB
5.1 → Dome
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Stylish 5.1 sub/sat system with remarkable voice

Highs: Bold, full and detailed sound quality for music and home cinema; gorgeous design
Lows: Large cabinets offer more presence; bit pricey

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 100W,
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 100W
Finish: Aluminium; red, black, white; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 178
For more info visit:
www.focal-uk.com

Editor's Choice...

KEF
5.1 → XQ Series
£5,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

This KEF 5.1 array mixes standmount surrounds with two hulking floorstanders to deliver a massive cinematic audio experience that's hard to fault – an ideal blend of deep bass, spacious mid-band and crystal clear treble. The design is gorgeous, too – another KEF masterclass in gloss black cabinets (curved to reduce internal reflections) and clearly taking a lead from the brand's awe-inspiring Reference system. Other variants of the speakers are available, so you can spec a more affordable, smaller-room setup should you wish.



Tested: Issue 174
For more info visit: www.kef.com/gb

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 2 x 200W, 2 x 120W, 1 x 150W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 1 x 200W
Finish: Gloss
Bookshelf: No chance



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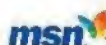
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Subwoofers

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NAIM
SW → n-Sub
£1,600 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Class AB amp-driven premium-level subwoofer

Highs: Rich, textured bass with tight control; innovative features
Lows: High-end rivals have a bit more grunt to 'em

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 2-Hz-250Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 350W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 29.6kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 177
For more info visit:
www.naim-audio.com



MARTINLOGAN
SW → Descent i
£3,250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Weapons-grade unit with 3 x 10in woofers

Highs: Superb engineering; Reference standard performance
Lows: Bulky and premium-priced; no automated setup

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 18Hz-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 500W
Driver: 3 x 10in
Weight: 47.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 167
For more info visit:
www.martinlogan.com



PARADIGM
SW → Signature Sub 2
£7,250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Reference grade sub for serious installs only

Highs: Astonishing power, control and speed; build quality is first-rate
Lows: Can you afford one?

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 7Hz-150Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 4,500W
Driver: 6 x 10in
Weight: 105.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 183
For more info visit:
www.paradigm.com



TANNOY
SW → TS1201
£600 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

12in sub with simultaneous LFE and speaker level inputs

Highs: Smart looks; easy of use; real weight and presence
Lows: Remote control will cost you extra

→ Specifications

Frequency response: Down to 21Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 500W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 16.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 179
For more info visit:
www.tannoy.com



VELODYNE
SW → SPL-1200 Ultra
From £1,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Potent sub – now with custom finish options

Highs: Tight, powerful bass; useful auto-calibration
Lows: Few added benefits over the step-down model

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 21-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 1,200W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 22kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 172
For more info visit:
www.velodyne.com

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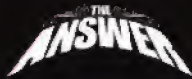
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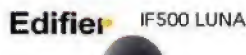
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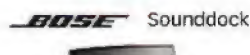
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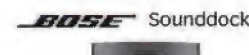
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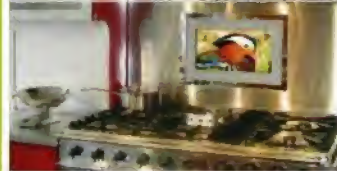


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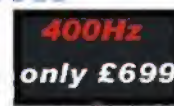


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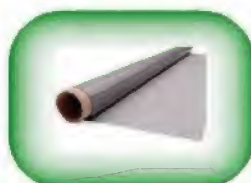
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